Splendor Solis

The World's Most Famous Alchemical Manuscript

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An Introduction to Splendor Solis

Stephen Skinner

Of all the illustrated alchemical texts perhaps the best known is the 16th-century *Splendor solis*. With its richly allegorical artworks and detailed instructions on the Great Work of transmuting a base material (*prima materia*) into the Philosophers' Stone, this manuscript immerses the modern reader into the mind of the Renaissance alchemist. Despite this, until now there has been no reasonably priced edition offering both a full English translation and reproductions of all the plates in colour.[1] Most current editions of *Splendor solis* are reproductions of a 1920 black-and-white version. By issuing this full-colour volume, complete with a new translation by Joscelyn Godwin of the definitive version of the manuscript (Harley MS 3469) held in the British Library, we hope to correct this deficiency.

This edition also includes my overview of the colour plates and original text, to aid navigation and uncover some of the manuscript's meaning, as well as illuminating essays by Rafał T. Prinke, on the latest research into the history and authorship of *Splendor solis*, and Georgiana Hedesan, on the links between *Splendor solis* and the renowned Swiss physician, alchemist and astrologer Paracelsus. Georgiana Hedesan has also provided a useful glossary of the alchemical philosophers and works referred to in *Splendor solis*.

Splendor solis in the 20th century

Splendor solis underwent something of a revival in the early 20th century, largely thanks to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a magical order founded by three adepts in 1888. One of these, S. L. MacGregor Mathers, wrote many of the rituals and researched and published a number of works,

including several grimoires (magicians' handbooks). Among the early members of the Golden Dawn was the alchemist and minister Rev. W. A. Ayton. It seems that Mathers and Ayton were both interested in *Splendor solis*. Mathers is even reputed to have published an edition of the text in 1907, incorporating his notes on the Kabbalistic and Tarot implications of the text and its alchemical symbolism, but sadly I have not been able to find a copy.[2] It must have been a very small edition as there is no trace of it even in the British Library catalogue. Julius Kohn, believed to have been the translator of the 1920 black-and-white version of *Splendor solis*,[3] was a pupil of Ayton.

Kohn's edition did not receive much attention, and it was not until the advent of universal colour printing in the late 20th century that colour reproductions of the plates in *Splendor solis* began to appear. Kohn's translation has interpolated references to the Tarot. He did considerable research into alchemical manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, one of which contains translations by the 17th-century antiquary Elias Ashmole of some essays credited to Trismosin.[4] Kohn was also interested in plant-based alchemy and magnetic and odic medicine, which were popular in the early 20th century.

The title page [f.1r] of the manuscript of *Splendor solis* held in the British Library (Harley 3469).

Oxford. S.A.

ab gegenwirckig
Puechel wirt ge-
nannt Splendor
Solis ader Sonn-
en glantz Layllt
sich in Silber Saf-
tat durch welliche
beschriben wirt die
khunstlich Wirck-
ung des vrporgue

The other 20th-century milestone in the life of *Splendor solis* was the limited edition published in 1981 by Adam McLean in his excellent *Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks* series, and reissued in 1991 by Phanes Press, with a commentary by Adam. This edition had one shortcoming: the illustrations were black-and-white line drawings from an earlier edition printed in Hamburg, with much less detail than the manuscript published in the present volume. What's more, the Latin text that appears on some plates was omitted by the German engraver, along with the beautiful and elaborate borders overflowing with symbolism. And the translation included in that edition was of a version of the text inferior to the Harley MS 3469.

A LIFELONG FASCINATION

My own interest in alchemy dates back to my teen years when I enjoyed browsing the mysterious images often associated with this art. Looking at, for example, the 17th-century alchemical text the *Mutus Liber*, literally the "Silent Book", with its strange succession of images or "emblems" stirred me to embark upon a quest to see as many alchemical images as possible, hoping that in the end they would all make sense.

I was also intrigued by the series of emblems I found in *Atalanta fugiens* (1617) by Michael Maier, a German doctor of medicine, and self-styled "Count of the Imperial Consistory" and "Free Nobleman". A series of tantalizing epigrammatic verses accompanied each emblem but these, if anything, increased the mystery rather than solving it. The subtitle *Emblemata nova de secretis naturae chymica* promised new emblems of the secrets of natural chemistry. There were drawings of salamanders and secret gardens, kings beheaded, burned, drowned and buried. Looking back at this text published just 35 years after the manuscript of *Splendor solis* here reproduced, I can clearly see a number of parallels, such as a double fountain, a king swimming and a hermaphrodite. Such emblems percolate through the history of alchemy, but don't always mean the same thing – this is both the charm and challenge of interpreting these texts. The alchemists never wanted to make this process easy.

At the same time, I developed an interest in Dr John Dee, mathematician to Queen Elizabeth I, and his colleague Edward Kelley, who claimed to have found in Glastonbury a flask of red powder and the alchemical book of St Dunstan. With the red powder he and Dee demonstrated various examples of transmutation of base metals into gold. Such claims are not unique and seldom believable, but in this case Kelley and Dee freely admitted that they could not produce the red powder of projection itself, but only knew how to use it. After splitting from Dee, Kelley later became rich and famous enough to be knighted by Rudolf II of Bohemia, which gives some evidence of his skills as an alchemist. There was even a fairly wellattested story of his having transmuted half of a copper warming pan, leaving the gold side attached to the remaining copper side. Such stories piqued my curiosity and made me more certain that alchemy was at heart a physical art and not just an academic game of images and emblems.

It wasn't until the mid-1970s that I finally came across a practitioner who was actually doing these experiments with real chemical equipment. He introduced himself simply as Lapidus and made me swear not to reveal his identity.[5] He owned a furrier's shop in London, close to Baker Street underground station. In the cellars of his shop he had fitted out a modern alchemist's laboratory and was following the classics like Pontanus, Artephius and Ali Puli step by step. As we will see later, one of the main indicators of success for the ancient alchemists was a particular sequence of colour changes. I was fascinated to see that Lapidus had indeed succeeded in replicating that sequence and reaching a point close to the conclusion of the operation. By using laboratory heating devices, which could maintain a specific temperature, without fluctuation, for long periods of time, rather than relying on unreliable assistants to stoke and damp a coal furnace, he avoided the hazards that plagued the ancient alchemists. He also avoided frequent breakages of glass equipment by using modern Pyrex cucurbits and flasks. Nevertheless, he had many false starts before he decided that the operation must begin with a specific metallic ore.

In 1976 we collaborated on the writing and editing of his book on practical alchemy entitled *In Pursuit of Gold*, which incorporated some of his discoveries. *Splendor solis* was among the manuscripts we discussed. In turning again to this classic of alchemy, I am reminded of the sequence of

colour changes that Lapidus replicated, including the stunningly beautiful image of the “peacock” being sublimed on the walls of the flask (the stage seen in Plate 16). After witnessing that, it is hard for me to think of alchemy in anything other than its most physical incarnation and so I will look at this beautiful manuscript from that point of view, having first discounted some other more fanciful readings based on Jungian archetypes and the Tarot.

What *Splendor solis* is not

ALCHEMY PSYCHOLOGIZED

Splendor solis, and alchemy in general, have been subjected to various unsustainable interpretations. Many of these derive from the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung’s theory of archetypes – significant patterns and images derived from mythology, religion, dreams and art that reside in our collective cultural unconscious and influence our attitudes and behaviour.

While researching the depths of the subconscious, Jung became aware that the archetypes he identified had also inspired other thinkers in past times who were working in entirely different spheres. Alchemy was one field that yielded a series of such images. Many of these images came from emblem books, which were collections of references used by artists to portray standard themes like the gods of Greece and Rome. The gods of classical mythology have helped shape the cultural subconscious of the West. So it is not surprising that such images also surfaced in the dreams of Jung’s patients. So far so good. But the modern trend, initiated by Jung, of projecting these images backwards and inferring that the alchemists were also writing about psychological and spiritual conditions simply will not fly. Anyone who attempts to interpret *Splendor solis* in this manner will soon find that the intricacies of the processes described therein do not easily provide spiritual succour for modern readers. The parallel between transmutation and transubstantiation provided material for religious speculation, and so it is true that some alchemical texts insisted upon moral and spiritual purity in the alchemist, but no trace of those requirements appears anywhere in this manuscript.

The alchemists were primarily concerned with the creation of the Philosophers' Stone, the Universal Medicine and the transmutation of base metals into gold. They were not interested in using these formulae as a form of depth psychology, and are more likely to have visited their priest if they had any spiritual concerns. Projecting the methods of psychotherapy backwards on to the thinking of medieval alchemists is completely anachronistic. It is ironic that Jung and his collaborator Marie-Louise von Franz took *Aurora consurgens* as their model, because it was also partly the model for *Splendor solis.* An example of this kind of interpretation can be found in one explanation of the gods portrayed in the planetary plates (Plates 12–18). Each of the seven planets known at the time was associated with a particular god and these gods had classic representations found in emblem books and many other manuscripts of the medieval and Renaissance periods. In *Splendor solis* the relevant god appears riding in a chariot at the top of the plate as a way of identifying the planet in question (which is not otherwise mentioned in the text). However, according to the Jungian analyst Joe Cambray, "These figures are in effect images of the libido whose energy must be harnessed to allow particular archetypal expressions to unfold during the corresponding phase of the work."

The animals pulling the chariots are those classically associated with the respective god or goddess, so that two dragons pull the chariot of Saturn[6] in the first planetary plate, and a pair of peacocks pull Jupiter's chariot in the second planetary plate. However, in the Jungian interpretation, this change from dragons to peacocks is apparently not the result of the change in classical symbolism from one god to another, but "represents a shift from the efforts to exert control over the imagination that is reactively driven by unconscious, somatic processes, to a focus on employing various dimensions of narcissism that will be required for an expanded view of the Self that is to come."[7] Enough said.

TAROT READINGS

There are 22 images in *Splendor solis* and 22 trump cards in the Tarot. This numerical coincidence has led some writers – mistakenly – to draw a symbolic parallel between the two. To a large extent this approach originated in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Because of Mathers'

interest in the Tarot, Golden Dawn teaching tended to see everything esoteric in the context of the 22 Tarot trump cards and their placement on the 22 paths of the Tree of Life by Christian Kabbalists.[8]

Given their association with the Golden Dawn, it is perhaps not surprising that the Rev. Ayton and Julius Kohn were among those who linked the 22 Tarot trumps to the 22 alchemical images. However, any careful analysis of the 22 plates of *Splendor solis* will show that there is very little correlation beyond the presence of the seven planets in both systems, and absolutely no correspondence in terms of the order of the images.

The remaining images show almost no correspondence. Not only do the sequences not match, but it is hard to find a single Tarot trump with a good symbolic or visual link to *any* of the 22 plates in *Splendor solis*. Of course, if one tries hard enough anything can be construed as an allegory. Even St Augustine thought he saw Christian theology in alchemical texts. Similarly, in the Orthodox world, Stephen of Alexandria imposed an interpretative structure on alchemical texts. But these are cases of retrospectively imposing a pattern on a text rather than discovering the original intention of the author.

What Splendor Solis is

A PHYSICAL ART

Despite the claims of psychoanalysts and magicians, alchemy is above all a physical art concerned with the transmutation of one material into another. Many alchemical texts, including *Splendor solis*, explain transmutation in terms of a series of steps. Often there are twelve stages, sometimes only four or seven. The earliest description of the Elements was given by Heraclitus (*c.* 535–475 BCE). He was not an alchemist as we now understand that term, but he outlined the four Elements of Fire, Earth, Air, and Water and explained that everything was generated by the *transmutation* of one Element into another. (Heraclitus's theory of the Elements and his conception of the world as being in a state of constant change are very close to Taoist philosophy.) There are many complex

sequences in this manuscript, but let us initially apply the four Elements at a simple visual level:

Fire (Plate 4) – The King stands in a fire

Earth (Plate 5) – A mountain being mined

Air (Plate 6) – Many birds flying in the air

Water (Plate 7) – The King is seen swimming in a river

More importantly Heraclitus described the sequence of change as a sequence of colour changes: *melanosis* (black), *leukosis* (white), *xanthosis* (yellow), and *iõsis* (red). This colour sequence was adopted by the alchemists and is one of the main symbolic frameworks presented in this manuscript.

There are many accounts of attempts at physical transmutation. One interesting account of this use of *Splendor solis* is given on an unnumbered leaf of Harley MS 3469. This does not show up in the printed facsimile edition, but can be clearly seen in the manuscript itself:

> "Baron Boetcher[9] of Dresden is s[ai]d to have made (transformed) many hundred weight of Gold according to the method of this Book – he learned ye Art of an Apothecary in Berlin.
>
> Baron Bottcher was originally of Schlais [Schleiz] in Voigtland, and apprenticed to one Zorn, an Apothecary in Berlin, where he met with an alchemist who promised to teach him the Chrysopoetic Art,[10] in return for some good offices Bottcher had rendered him. Concluding his fortune was made he ran away into Saxony, whither his Master pursued him, but the Magistrates protected him and urged him to give a proof of his Knowledge, which he was unable to perform, having been indeed imposed upon.
>
> Making some experiments, however, he accidentally discovered the manner of making Porcelain, and was thus in his own Person, transmuted from an Alchemist into a Potter. His first porcelain, which

> he manufactured at Dresden An[no] 1706, was of a brownish red colour being made of a brown Clay. He invented the white [porcelain] in 1709, and in 1710 the manufactory at Misnia [Meissen] was established."

When King Frederick I of Prussia learned that Böttger had figured out how to make the Stone, he ordered that Böttger be taken into "protective custody". Böttger escaped but was soon detained and taken back to Dresden. He was later held in Enns in Austria in 1703. The monarch of Saxony, Augustus II, who was always short of money, demanded that Böttger produce the Stone in order to convert base metals into gold. Imprisoned in a dungeon, Böttger toiled away for years. In 1704, impatient at the lack of progress, Augustus ordered Walther von Tschirnhaus to oversee Böttger's work. Von Tschirnhaus was attempting a different chemical feat, to emulate the translucent porcelain then being imported from China at great expense. In 1708 Böttger finally produced the desired results. Von Tschirnhaus died suddenly soon after, and Böttger got to finish the project and notify the King of his discovery. Translucent porcelain in those days cost its weight in gold and was in fact sometimes referred to as "white gold". Böttger became head of the first Meissen porcelain factory, and so he did eventually transform his fortunes by making gold – it was just not the kind of gold he had set out to create.

Like Böttger's breakthrough, many chemical processes have been derived from alchemical experiments, particularly processes associated with medicine, smelting and dyeing. But for the alchemist these were secondary matters. Alchemy was truly the Royal Art, not just because its patrons were often kings, but because it attempted to improve on nature. Nobody expected transmutation to be easy, as its basic aim was to speed up the processes of nature, a rather awesome and challenging objective. While modern science may not share the same theoretical assumptions about the growth and change of metallic ores into metals in Nature, anyone who has visited a mine will have no difficulty visualizing this idea, especially where veins of different ores intersect with samples of the uncombined metal, appearing as an on-going process frozen in time.

One of the great principles of physical alchemy was that of cyclical repetition. The alchemists saw (or thought they saw) different outcomes

when the same process was repeated not once but many times. They did not expect a linear process, and as you will see, in *Splendor solis* the same series is repeated in several different ways. Similar thinking occurs in the modern process of manufacturing homoeopathic medicines, where the original compound may be diluted and shaken or percussed repetitively many times. It is interesting that homoeopathy owes some of its roots to the work of Paracelsus, and hence to alchemical thinking. In conclusion, I urge you to read this manuscript on its own terms, in the manner in which Baron Böttger and Lapidus both read it, as an intricate and beautiful guide to the Great Art of transmutation, and not as a stand-in for other symbolic systems.

[1] The only exception is the full-colour English edition published by M. Moleiro in 2010, which is out of print and now sells second-hand for in excess of $3,000.

[2] Mathers is said to have passed his manuscript to F. L. Gardner in partpayment of a debt, and Gardner published it in about 1907, in the hope of recouping his expenses. However, Mathers protested when he found out. See Ithell Colquhoun, *The Sword of Wisdom*, Putnam, New York, 1975.

[3] The translator's name is not given in full, but only as "J. K."

[4] Ashmole MS 1408.

[5] After Lapidus had died, I felt able to reveal that his name was David Curwen. I later met his grandson, Tony Matthews, when *In Pursuit of Gold* was republished in 2011.

[6] Called Mercurius Senex (old Mercury), rather than Saturn, by Cambray because he carries a caduceus as well as a sickle.

[7] Joseph L. Henderson and Dyane N. Sherwood, *Transformation of the Psyche: The Symbolic Alchemy of the Splendor Solis*, Routledge, London, 2015, p. xi.

[8] In contrast, the Hebrew Kabbalah sees no links between the Tarot and the Tree of Life.

[9] Johann Friedrich Böttger (1682–1719), whose last name is spelled variously as Boetcher, Bottcher, Bötger, Böttcher and Böttiger.

[10] The art of transmuting base metals into gold, a term first used in a Greek papyrus, the *Chrysopoeia of Cleopatra*, dating from the 1st century ce. It also occurs in *De Chrysopoeia*, written by Stephen of Alexandria.

History and Authorship of Splendor Solis

Rafał T. Prinke

Many historians of alchemy have investigated the mysterious *Splendor solis* and proposed a number of possible authors and artists who might have been behind the work. Based on close analysis of surviving printed editions and manuscripts of *Splendor solis*, this contribution assesses the research conducted to date and reaches some new conclusions. Notably, it draws on genealogical evidence to propose a theory as to who painted the original *Splendor solis* artworks. However, before addressing that question, it is first necessary to survey the landscape of medieval and Renaissance alchemical writing, including those works that would have influenced *Splendor solis.*

A recurring life cycle

Alchemical writings of various civilizations seem to follow a similar life cycle. Whether in Greco-Roman Egypt or China, in India or the Islamic World, the earliest texts contain entirely rational discussions of the idea of metallic transmutations, drawing on observations of what craftsmen could achieve. When alchemists kept failing to produce genuine gold from other metals, they would start to construct elaborate systems of natural philosophy to help them understand the way in which chemical changes occur and approach their goal from that angle instead.

Initial enthusiasm would be followed by frustration when positive results did not materialize. Seekers of the Philosophers' Stone would move on to investigate its mystical interpretations or use alchemical imagery for purely literary and artistic purposes. Although practical work was often continued by even more people than before, they now came from the lower strata of

society and the writings produced for and by them tended to be unoriginal compilations and commentaries (Prinke 2014).

When the Islamic civilization passed on the torch of alchemy to Latin Europe, its ideas were soon noticed and discussed by such luminaries of 13th-century scholasticism as Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon. Toward the end of the century Pseudo-Geber (probably Paul of Taranto), the greatest authority of later Latin alchemy, used the scholastic tools of medieval rationalism to scrutinize the theories systematically.

The 14th century saw a proliferation of writings, often attributed to authors who never wrote on alchemy (most notably Arnaldus of Villanova and Ramon Lull), containing a wide spectrum of elaborate new ideas, systems and interpretations. These ranged from mechanicist and experimental to vitalist and prophetic. A religious brand of alchemy had already been introduced in the work of Petrus Bonus, the last great scholastic alchemist. His circa-1330 treatise *Pretiosa margarita novella* (“The New Pearl of Great Price”) may be seen as a symbolic link between the early and late periods of European medieval alchemy (Crisciani 1973). The final phase was the time of *florilegia* (compilations of quotations from earlier authorities), often translated into vernacular languages for the less educated. New genres included easily memorized poetry in simple rhyming verse, summarizing the theory and practice of alchemy for the illiterate, and the development of *alchimia picta* or pictorial representations of the Great Work as an alternative mnemonic aid to accompany a poem or prose text. Writers of alchemical treatises started using fewer analogies and more metaphors, which gave rise to iconographic imagery (Thorndike 1923–58, Multhauf 1993, Principe 2012).

REVIVAL DURING THE RENAISSANCE

Alchemy seemed to have run its course in Latin Europe and, based on the precedent set by earlier life cycles, one might have expected the mantle to have passed on at this point to a civilization in another part of the world. However, the rediscovery of ancient civilizations triggered by the Renaissance led to a revival of alchemy in Europe. Hermetic texts, humanism and philology, the spread of the printing press, and most notably the medicine and chemistry of Paracelsus, provided a new rational basis for

reexamining alchemical classics. Revised editions of key texts were made available in print and drew the attention of eminent intellectuals once again.

The Renaissance perspective was obviously different from that of medieval scholastics, being guided primarily by aesthetic considerations – the beauty and mystery of alchemy. Even though it may not look rational to us today, it certainly was to the intellectuals of the age, for whom the *prisca scientia* ("original or ancient knowledge") embraced the art of metallic transmutation as revealed by Hermes Trismegistus (Matton 2009). The new authors reinterpreted Islamic and medieval alchemical imagery, which originally had illustrative and mnemonic functions, in symbolic and enigmatic terms, often placing the old images in new contexts – for example, by combining them with allegories from other traditions, such as ancient mythology and medieval chivalric romance.

Above all, however, Renaissance alchemical authors were playing a rhetorical game with their readers, often involving phantasmagoria inspired by such works as *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* ("Poliphilo's Strife of Love in a Dream", 1499). The major early work of this current was *Chrysopoeia* (1515). Written in elegant humanist Latin by Giovanni Aurelio Augurello (1441–1524) and purporting to be a didactic poem teaching alchemy, *Chrysopoeia* was in fact just a confusing presentation of enigmatic symbols, which left the reader even more perplexed than before (Haskell 1997, Martels 2000).

The most famous of these poetic and prose pseudo-treatises was *The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz* (1616), written by the young Johann Valentin Andreae. Another, related tradition drew on the visual imagery of the medieval *alchimia picta* to create works combining loosely shuffled emblematic pictures and ambiguous dicta of the old masters of alchemy (Adams and Linden 1998). That genre reached the peak of its artistic expression in Michael Maier's *Atalanta fugiens* (1617), but its first example was *Splendor solis.* The quality of the illustrations in some of the surviving *Splendor solis* manuscripts surpasses anything else in the rich tradition of alchemical iconography, so it is worth having a brief look at the sources from which the designer of the *Splendor solis* illustrations would have drawn his inspiration.

Late medieval *alchimia picta*

The earliest-known European alchemical illustrations (other than drawings of equipment or cosmological diagrams) can be found in a late 14th-century Flemish poem of didactic allegory by a writer known as Gratheus, *filius philosophi*, "son of a philosopher" (Birkhan 1992). Although highly original in form, the work was clearly inspired by the 10th-century *Silvery Water and the Starry Earth* by Senior Zadith (Muhammad ibn Umail al-Tamini), one of the major works of the mystical and symbolic phase of Islamic alchemy, which was translated into Latin two or three centuries later as *Tabula chemica*. Some other metaphors of Gratheus derive from: the Greek alchemist Zosimos of Panopolis; *Turba philosophorum*, a very important Islamic text with possible Greek roots (its earliestknown version is *Book of the Meeting*, written by Uthman ibn Suwaid around 900); and Pseudo-Arnaldus of Villanova, where the parallel between the Philosophers' Stone and Christ first appeared.

The work of Gratheus did not receive wider circulation and therefore its images were not copied by later authors, but this period saw the creation of four other illuminated texts that exerted immense influence on the alchemical imagination of the following four centuries (Obrist 1982). They all share with Gratheus two main sources of inspiration – *Tabula chemica* and *Turba philosophorum* – but were not influenced by his work directly. They also contain direct or indirect references to a plethora of other earlier works, thus showing their authors' erudition and representing an attempt to create a synthesis of alchemical teachings. With one exception, those works are difficult to date precisely, but most probably they were produced in the very late 14th or early 15th century.

Although perhaps not the earliest of the four texts, *Aurora consurgens* ("Rising Dawn") is most closely related to Senior's *Tabula chemica*, being a commentary on it, using mostly biblical citations, and – in its second book – a commentary on that commentary with quotations from alchemical texts. In some manuscripts it was attributed to St Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), but should more probably be dated to around 1420 or 1430, certainly not earlier than 1400. The text is illustrated with 37 images, some displaying flasks with symbolic stages of the Great Work; others show sexual intercourse as

the union of opposites; while still others depict particular procedures as allegories or analogies to aid memorization and understanding of the whole process. Some of the images have sources that can be traced to Islamic alchemy and some are even derived from Zosimos of Panopolis. Other than one picture of the Holy Trinity, there are no obvious Christian elements, even though the text itself is full of them (Franz 1966, Crisciani and Pereira 2008, Aurora 2011).

Even more explicit sexual symbolism is found in the illustrations of the German didactic poem *Sol und Luna*, variously dated to circa 1400 or after 1450, some other features of which, like the figure of the hermaphrodite or the scene of resurrection, imply a connection with *Aurora consurgens*. Here, however, the resurrected figure is Christ, thus linking it to the Pseudo-Arnaldian identification of him with the Philosophers' Stone (a similar graphic representation is already found in Gratheus). These images and the poem itself were incorporated at quite an early stage into *Rosarium philosophorum* ("Rose Garden of the Philosophers"), one of the most famous Latin alchemical *florilegia*, compiled shortly before 1400 and first printed in 1550 (Telle 1980, 1992).

The process of the Great Work shown entirely in a series of flasks with symbolic figures, again involving explicitly sexual images but no Christian elements, appears in another *florilegium* entitled *Donum Dei* ("Gift of God"). Written in German, its text may date from the mid-14th century, while the illustrations may have been created independently, as they do not correspond closely to the text, and merged into it at some time before 1450. The author of both *Rosarium philosophorum* and *Donum Dei* is sometimes identified as Georg Aurach, but he appears to have been only a copyist active around 1475 (Paulus 1997).

The religious reinterpretation of alchemy within the scope of Christian mysticism found its full expression, devoid of any sexual elements, in the fourth of the works discussed here, namely the *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit* ("Book of the Holy Trinity"). The first part presents the alchemical process as a parallel to the Passion of Christ and is appropriately illustrated; the second part contains practical recipes; while the third part is prophetic and political, predicting the coming of a great emperor who will

conquer the Antichrist. Heraldic elements, especially the black double-headed eagle, suggest the identity of that emperor as Sigismund of Luxembourg (1368–1437), for whom the work had originally been written (he received an early shorter version), but eventually the author presented it to Frederic I of Brandenburg (1371–1440). Based on internal evidence, the book can be precisely dated as having been begun in 1410 and completed in 1415–16 during the Council of Constance. Later sources ascribe it to a Franciscan monk called Ulmannus and though the name itself is doubtful, the author must have been a Franciscan, because the last image shows St Francis receiving stigmata as a parallel to the alchemical *Donum Dei*. In 1433 a revised version, with the religious fragments toned down and the alchemical elements amplified, was prepared for Frederic's son John the Alchemist (1406–64) (Junker 1986).

Medieval copyists of alchemical texts often added their own comments and quotations from other works, so that one may find copies of treatises citing authors who did not even live at the time the original was written. Similarly, when copying illustrated works an alchemical scribe might incorporate images from other sources if they seemed to fit his interpretations. This makes it quite difficult to reconstruct the relative chronologies of those texts. For example, the *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit* and *Sol und Luna* (*Rosarium philosophorum*) share four identical images: the coronation of Mary, Christ's resurrection and two hermaphrodites, representing the Luciferian Trinity and the Alchemical Trinity. They seem to fit better in the religious context of the *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit*, but could just as easily have been borrowed from the *Rosarium*, where they might have been used to Christianize the Islamic poem. As one cannot be sure whether *Sol und Luna* predates the *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit*, and, if it does, whether all illustrations were there from the beginning, any statement on their relationship to each other must remain highly speculative. In the case of the revised edition of 1433, which incorporates two images from Senior, there can be no doubt that these images are not original to the German work, but it is uncertain whether the author took them from *Tabula chemica*, *Aurora consurgens*, a version of *Sol und Luna*, or some other unidentified work.

By the end of the 15th century compilers of alchemical *florilegia* apparently no longer used original texts but just shuffled the dicta from existing collections to produce new ones. Likewise, illustrations were borrowed individually from different series, and works of *alchimia picta* slowly evolved into collections of emblems, especially as that form of expression became more and more popular in literary circles outside the world of alchemy. Its classic form consisted of a curious image accompanied by an equally enigmatic phrase and a short poem, seemingly unrelated to one another. The intention was to create in the reader's mind some deeper meaning that could only be expressed by free association of ideas evoked by each of the media separately.

Alchemical authors soon realized that this was an excellent form in which to enwrap their speculations, hinting at a great mystery to be discovered by contemplating the emblems, parables and enigmas. Individual images taken out of their contexts in different works of the medieval *alchimia picta* could now be shuffled and laid out in new sequences, pretending to hide the true secrets of the Philosophers' Stone. Sometimes they were modified to suit the accompanying text: literary imagery was turned into pictures, elements from nonalchemical iconography or explanatory inscriptions were added, thus creating entirely new symbolic narrations. *Splendor solis* is the earliest example – not yet fully formed – of this emblematic tradition within alchemical writings, so it is worth having a closer look at its sources.

Sources of *Splendor solis*

When the mysterious Hermann Fictuld, perhaps the most original and erudite alchemical author of the 18th century, published his annotated bibliography of alchemical writings, he divided them into those of genuine adepts and those of false sophists. Unsure where to place *Splendor solis*, he eventually included it among the approved titles, with a note stating that the "author is unknown" and that "with his figures [the author] wanted to give only to the Knower's Eye an understanding of which class he belonged to, while to those who are ignorant [he gave] a *Gaffwerck* [literally, 'a work to gape at'], from which they should not expect the slightest benefit."[1] One could hardly think of a better description of *Splendor solis*. Indeed, it

remains a work that gives mysteriously unexplainable pleasure when one just gapes in awe at its calligraphic and iconographic layers, admiring the artistic and conceptual beauty of its masterfully executed manuscripts. For it is not just a haphazard collection of dicta and unrelated images, but has a thought-out textual structure and iconographic programme.

The text itself is rather banal, consisting mostly of quotations from a large number of alchemical authorities, and thus can be categorized as a *florilegium*. It is hard to say whether the quoted fragments come directly from original texts or through the intermediary of other *florilegia*. Not all of them are referenced, so some parts of the text look as if they were written by the author of *Splendor solis*. In a number of cases it is indeed difficult to identify their sources, but scholars researching the work discovered that the underlying main source of *Splendor solis* was *Aurora consurgens* (Hartlaub 1937, Völlnagel 2004). Not only are the titles of the two books linked – dawn's rising (*aurora consurgens*) leading to the full splendour of the sun (*splendor solis*) – but large portions of the text come directly from the earlier work, either as unreferenced quotations or summaries and paraphrased sections. Even the seven-treatise structure, with the third treatise containing seven parables, seems to be loosely based on that of *Aurora consurgens*, the first book of which has twelve chapters including seven parables. The author of the work apparently had to finish it (or lost interest and energy) before completing the sophisticated design he had intended, as the last three treatises, as well as the interlude preceding them, have no illustrations and their texts are almost entirely copied from *Aurora consurgens* (Hofmeier 2011, 49–50). The earlier parts also include extensive fragments, including the fifth parable (of the egg), which comes from the tenth chapter of *Aurora consurgens.*

Some of the text is closely related to the accompanying images, even describing them in great detail (as in the case of the seven parables); in other places it just mentions their content ("child's play" and "women's work"). Elsewhere the connection is not clear (the seven planetary flasks and others). Interestingly, the images not referred to in the text are the obvious iconographic borrowings, but perhaps the author judged that their relevance was clear enough not to require explanation. On the other hand, the images with descriptions or references appear to have been designed by

the author himself on the basis of literary depictions of those scenes in earlier alchemical (or other) texts, because their iconographic sources cannot be found. Thus one may be relatively sure that *Splendor solis* was either originally designed as an illustrated text or, alternatively, the miniatures may have been prepared for the preexisting text (there are no phrases explicitly confirming the existence of images), but certainly they were not designed independently. In either case, much intellectual work was devoted to its creation.

A PLATE-BY-PLATE ANALYSIS OF SOURCES

The iconographic sources, parallels and possible artistic inspirations of the miniatures were meticulously traced by Jörg Völlnagel, who has carried out the most extensive research on *Splendor solis* to date (Völlnagel 2004). However, his list does not cover literary sources, so in the following overview those of them that could be identified will be mentioned, along with direct borrowings from alchemical works, leaving the non-alchemical artistic inspirations aside. Because the majority of the images have their sources in *Aurora consurgens*, pointers to particular pages in John Ferguson's translation are included in parentheses for easy reference (Aurora 2011).

The first image, "The Arms of the Art", is especially interesting, because it is found only in some manuscripts of *Aurora consurgens* (6). The earliest of them is dated to circa 1450, so one of these copies must have been available to the author of *Splendor solis* (Crisciani and Pereira 2008, 140–43). "The Philosopher and His Flask" (probably Senior Zadith himself) is likewise copied directly from that treatise (14), while for the next image – "The Knight of the Double Fountain" – Völlnagel sees parallels in the two hermaphrodites from the *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit* (one holding a sword and the other standing on what looks like two rocks with springs flowing from them) and the naked Queen standing on two furnaces, known from one early manuscript of the *Buch* dated to between 1450 and 1475. While there are some similarities, it also seems possible that the image was inspired by *The Visions of Zosimos* (Rosinus), in which a Man of Copper appears with a sword and is named the ruler of two waters, white and yellow (Taylor 1937, 89–90). The second image in the same treatise is "The Lunar Queen and Solar King", thus providing another depiction of the two

opposites dealt with in the text (where they are referred to as woman and man). The source is obviously *Sol und Luna* (*Rosarium philosophorum*) or *Donum Dei.*

The “Mining the Ore” miniature is again borrowed from *Aurora consurgens* (85). However, the next one, “The Alchemical Tree with Golden Boughs”, has classical inspiration in Virgil’s *Aeneid* (Book VI), as indicated in the text. It may have been indirectly received from *Pretiosa margarita novella* by Petrus Bonus of Ferrara,[2] where that quotation first appeared in an alchemical context. The origins of the image of “The Drowning King” and its accompanying parable are unclear. It may likewise have a classical source, although the description gives no clue of this. A story of the underwater kingdom of a *rex marinus* is related in the *Vision of Arisleus*, closely connected to *Turba philosophorum*, but the context is quite different.

Similarly, the intriguing image of “The Angel and the Dark Man in the Swamp”, described in the text as a Moor, has no clear analogy in earlier alchemical imagery. A far-fetched source may be a treatise by Pseudo-Albertus Magnus entitled *Super arborem Aristotelis* (“On the Tree of Aristotle”), where it is advised that a certain process should last “until the black head bearing the resemblance of the Ethiopian is well washed and begins to turn white”, and after a longer time the red colour will appear (Magnus 1572, 684; Jung 1980, 401–02, note 171). The towel held by the angel indeed suggests that the Moor has been washed, while his head and hands do change colour, but the link is far from certain. On the other hand, it seems quite sure that the winged hermaphrodite of the following image is based on those in the *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit* and *Sol und Luna* (*Rosarium philosophorum*), modified to reflect the egg and nature parable, itself derived from *Aurora consurgens* (75).

The sources of the next two images are clearly stated by the author. “The Dismembered Body with a Golden Head”, the butchering of which had been performed by a man with a sword, is indeed described in *The Visions of Zosimos* (Taylor 1937, 91–2), while “The Boiled Philosopher Rejuvenated” comes from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (Book VII, Medea and Pelias). The latter is the other classical reference in *Splendor solis*, likewise

first used by Petrus Bonus. There is also a similar image in *Aurora consurgens* (37) (without reference to Ovid in that text), which may have inspired the author for his design.

An iconographic representation of the stages of the Great Work as symbolic images within alchemical flasks had already been attempted in the book of Gratheus, expanded in *Aurora consurgens*, but the first work to use that convention consistently was *Donum Dei*, later much expanded in *Coronatio naturae* ("The Crowning of Nature"). The idea and design of the seven planetary miniatures in *Splendor solis* clearly derive from *Donum Dei*, but with certain modifications and some entirely new symbols. The dragon (but without a child feeding it), the White Queen and the Red King are found in *Donum Dei*, while the three birds and the peacock come from *Aurora consurgens* (30 and 68). The remaining symbols – the triple-headed eagle and triple-headed dragon – are of unknown origin and the accompanying text does not allude to any triplicity.

In the last section, "The Darkness of the Putrefied Sun" comes from *Rosarium philosophorum*, where the winged sun appears to rise from the grave. In *Splendor solis* that image has been split into two separate images. The first shows the dead or putrefied sun, and the other – the final image of "The Red Sun" – shows the sun risen from the dead in full glory and splendour. The remaining miniatures, "Child's Play" and "Women's Work", are simply pictorial renderings of the statement made by Pythagoras in *Turba philosophorum* that alchemy is like "women's work and the play of children" (later quoted in other works such as *Aurora consurgens* and *Rosarium philosophorum*) (90).

To summarize, the iconography of *Splendor solis* is closely related to the images in the well-known illustrated alchemical works of the early 15th century, with some new renderings of textual metaphors from other works, and some symbolic depictions of unknown origin, which may have been designed by the author. Some illustrations are strongly linked to the text, which suggests that they were not a separate series of images only later merged into *Splendor solis* (as was the case with *Sol und Luna* and *Rosarium philosophorum*), but they could have been designed for a preexisting text. Some symbolic figures that one would expect to see are

noticeably missing. For example, the green lion devouring the sun from *Rosarium philosophorum* would have been an obvious choice to borrow for *Splendor solis*. Likewise, the prominent extended sexual metaphors in *Donum Dei* and *Rosarium* (*Sol und Luna*), also present in *Aurora consurgens* and at least implied in the *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit*, are totally absent, as are any religious themes from the latter work and *Rosarium*. Moreover, they do not appear in the text of *Splendor solis*, either.

The text itself is a *florilegium*, based mostly on *Aurora consurgens* but incorporating numerous quotations from other authors. A vast majority of these other quotations come from *Turba philosophorum* (either cited as such or attributed to particular individuals, or else simply credited to "Philosophers", in which case the source is not always certain) and Senior Zadith's *Tabula chemica*. The remaining authorities include Aristotle (both his genuine works and alchemical pseudepigrapha), a selection of Islamic authors known from medieval translations, and just four early medieval names associated with Latin alchemy: Albertus Magnus (*c*. 1200–80); Pietro d'Abano, the "Reconciler" (*c*. 1257–1316); Geber (probably Paul of Taranto), author of *Summa perfectionis magisterii* (*c*. 1310); and Petrus Bonus ("Ferrarius"), author of *Pretiosa margarita novella* (*c*. 1330).

Conspicuously missing are the numerous works attributed to Arnaldus of Villanova and Ramon Lull, which proliferated during the 14th and 15th centuries and from which *Rosarium philosophorum* excerpted numerous quotations. Because the author of *Splendor solis* almost certainly knew that *florilegium*, it may be assumed that he intentionally omitted the more recent authorities to make his work look ancient and thus more appealing to his contemporaries. A reader versed in alchemical literature might have viewed this work either as a chaos of symbols or as a novel presentation of the great secret veiled under some of the old visual metaphors, rearranged and augmented by a true adept. The identity of that adept was variously established by later copyists, editors and historians, but none of their conjectures is convincing in the light of modern research.

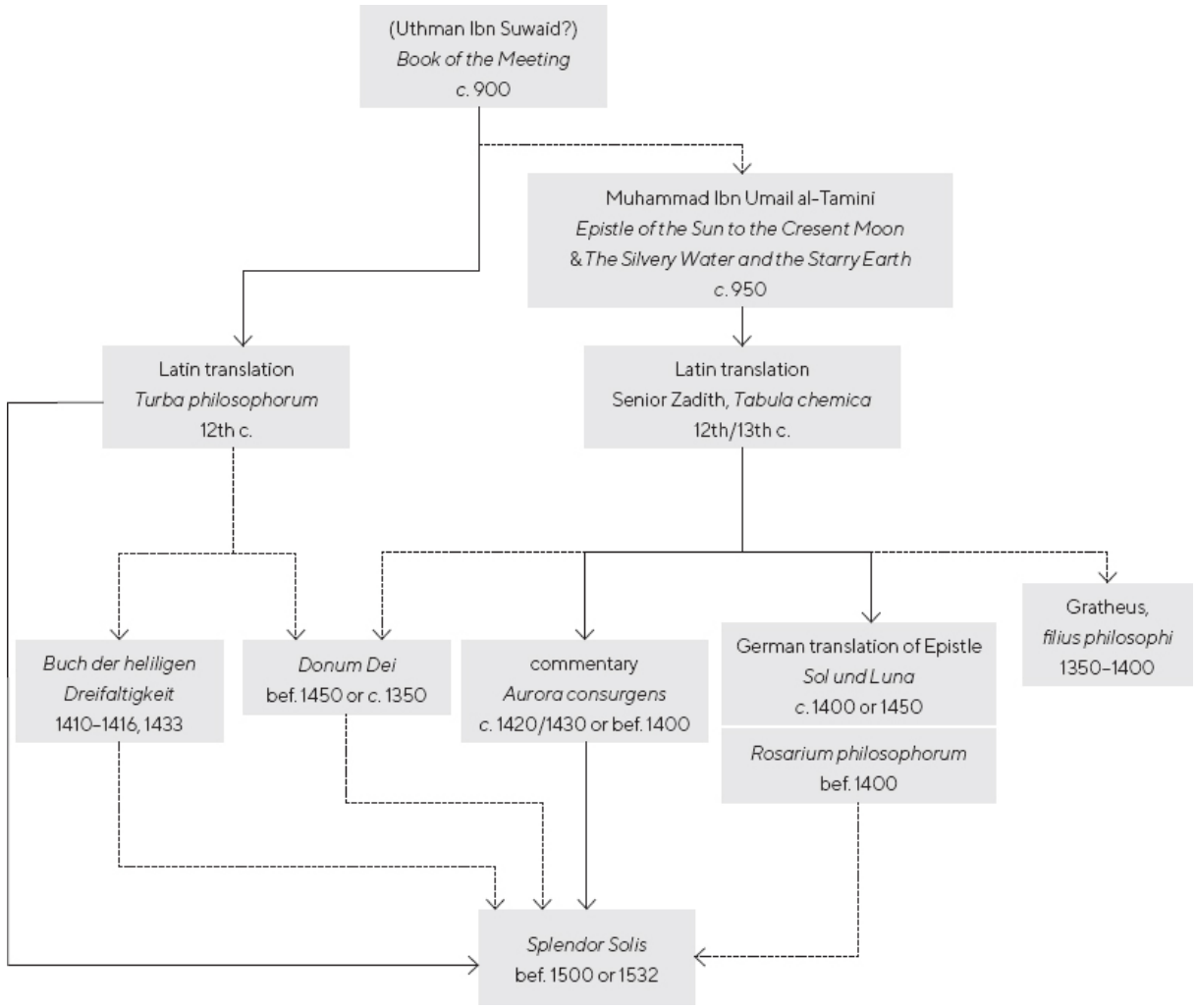

Figure 1: Sources of *Splendor solis*. The solid lines denote direct dominant influence, whereas dashed lines indicate secondary indirect borrowings.

The printed *Splendor solis*

Because at least one modern scholar seriously questions the dating of the illuminated manuscripts of *Splendor solis*, proposing that they were produced after the first printed edition, it is better to have a look at the publishing history first and then deal with the handwritten versions.

As already mentioned, one of the reasons for the revival of interest in alchemy during the Renaissance was the spread of typography, which enabled the publication of relatively cheap collections of alchemical

treatises. The first such compendium was *De alchemia* (1541), edited by one “Chrysogonus Polydorus”, undoubtedly the great humanist Andreas Osiander (1498–1552), who was also responsible for the publication of Copernicus’s *De revolutionibus* (Gilly 2003, 451; Kahn 2007, 101). *De alchemia* appeared in Nuremberg, but soon Strasbourg and Basel became the centres of alchemical publishing activities. It was in Basel that the most important 16th-century collections, gathered and edited by Guglielmo Gratarolo (1516–68), were printed by Pietro Perna (1519–1582). After the former’s death, the latter continued the project on his own and passed it on to his son-in-law Konrad Waldkirch (1549–1616).

Perhaps inspired by their success, a “Lover of the Art” edited a similar collection entitled *Aureum vellus* (“The Golden Fleece”), published in three volumes in Rorschach, near St Gallen. Although no printer is named, it was quite certainly the work of Leonhard Straub (1550–1601), the first printer of St Gallen, who was active in Rorschach at the time and used the imprint that can be found in *Aureum vellus* (Wegelin 1840, 25–52, esp. 45). The first volume (“*tractatus*”), containing texts attributed to a mysterious Salomon Trismosin, “the teacher of Paracelsus”, appeared in 1598 with an editorial note that the remaining two volumes would be published later that year. They were, in fact, eventually published in 1599, as that year appears in the colophon of “the third part of volume one” (the phrase suggesting plans for further volumes). The second part contains two sections, with texts attributed to Paracelsus and to the otherwise unknown Bartholomaeus Korndorffer, claimed to be a disciple of the influential German magus Johannes Trithemius.

The final volume comprises a number of texts by various named and anonymous authors. The first of them is *Splendor solis*, with crude woodblock illustrations (usually hand-coloured) of all 22 images. These were probably made by Georg Straub (1568–1611), Leonhard’s younger brother, who had just started his own printing workshop in St Gallen and was a woodblock engraver. There is absolutely no indication here or in the other two parts that the author of the treatise was Salomon Trismosin. His name is not even mentioned anywhere beyond the first volume, so the nowwidespread attribution of *Splendor solis* to him had not been forged at that time. Two more volumes of *Aureum vellus* were published in Basel in

1604, with the second one – the fifth in total – clearly described as the last. Neither of these mentions Trismosin at all. The title of the collection alluded to the alchemical reinterpretation of the ancient myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece, which had already been proposed earlier in Augurello's *Chrysopoeia* of 1515 and in Osiander's preface to *De alchemia* of 1541 (Faivre 1993).

The 1599 publication of the third volume of *Aureum vellus* appears to have been a success, as it was immediately reprinted in the same year (probably by Georg Straub) and a pirated edition followed in 1600, believed to have been printed by Henning Gross in Leipzig. The woodblock illustrations of *Splendor solis* are of much inferior quality here and not coloured. The third volume was expanded to include some more texts, notably two treatises of another newly created mythical author, Basil Valentine, reprinted from their first edition, which appeared only a year earlier. Although not named here, it was most probably Johann Thölde who supplied those additions, because he later released other works attributed to Valentinus and may have authored some of them. His close friend Joachim Tancke, a professor of medicine at Leipzig, was another author, editor and translator of alchemical texts, some of which were also published by Gross. Thus it may be cautiously surmised that Tancke was somehow involved in the 1600 edition, especially as ten years later he produced a collection of alchemical recipes entitled *Promptuarium alchemiae* ("Storeroom of Alchemy"), printed by Gross in Leipzig, with an accompanying volume of old treatises entitled *Appendix primi tomi promptuarii alchymiae.* The latter is a reprint of the pirated third volume of *Aureum vellus*, starting with *Splendor solis* (including the same woodblock illustrations), but without the additional material by Basil Valentine and others.

In 1708 all five parts of *Aureum vellus* were published in Hamburg by Christian Liebezeit, with a new preface and a new set of engraved *Splendor solis* images. The same edition was reprinted ten years later by Liebezeit and Theodor Christoff Ferginer, without changing the year on the title pages of the individual parts, under the title *Eröffnete Geheimnisse des Steins der Weisen* ("Opened Secrets of the Philosophers' Stone"). There would not be another printing of *Aureum vellus* until 1976, when a facsimile of the 1718 edition was published (Frick 1976).

As mentioned above, the 1599 *editio princeps* of the third volume of *Aureum vellus* in no way suggests that Salomon Trismosin was the author of *Splendor solis*. The same is true for all the later editions. The reason for ascribing it to that mythical philosopher and the source of the modern confusion came from the French translation entitled *La Toyson d'or*, published by Charles Sevestre of Paris in 1612. It is rather freely translated, with paraphrases and extended comments by one "L. I.", whose identity has not been discovered yet. The title page is loosely based on that of the first part of *Aureum vellus* and thus the name of Trismosin appears on it, but the content is restricted to *Splendor solis*, extracted from the third part and expanded by the translator.

This mistake, or perhaps intentional misrepresentation, was later uncritically accepted by "J. K." (most probably Julius Kohn), the translator of the first modern publication of *Splendor solis* in 1920, and then equally uncritically embraced by numerous scholars and researchers. The French version is illustrated with woodblock images, printed separately, coloured by hand, and pasted into the book (often in the wrong order). There was apparently an additional print run in 1613, which introduced the well-known engraved frontispiece showing most of the *Splendor solis* figures and other alchemical symbols arranged on one page. No further editions of this French version appeared until 1975, when it was republished together with a new translation of the German version from *Aureum vellus* (Husson 1975).

Although it seems obvious and is generally accepted by scholars that all early, modern, printed editions of *Splendor solis* derive from the 1599 version in the third volume of *Aureum vellus*, in 2012 Jacques Halbronn published a paper in which he proposed the existence of an earlier German edition, no copy of which has survived (Halbronn 2012). That hypothetical edition is supposed to have concurred with the text of *La Toyson d'or*, so the French translation would be closer to the original than the supposedly abridged versions of the later German editions. Halbronn's arguments are based on his analysis of illustrations and editorial differences, but are far from convincing.

Most astonishing is his claim that all the beautifully illuminated manuscripts of *Splendor solis* were produced after the printed editions, based on them and antedated, so that collectors of attractive alchemical works to whom they were sold, would pay higher prices. Even though one could theoretically argue that such artists were able to imitate the writing and painting style of a few decades earlier, this cannot be claimed about ordinary copies alchemists made for themselves. But Halbronn does not take into account that there were other manuscripts most certainly written well before 1599 that had no illustrations (and thus were not intended to lure rich collectors). Therefore, his hypothesis must be emphatically rejected in favour of the majority opinion of librarians, palaeographers and art historians concerning the age of particular *Splendor solis* manuscripts.

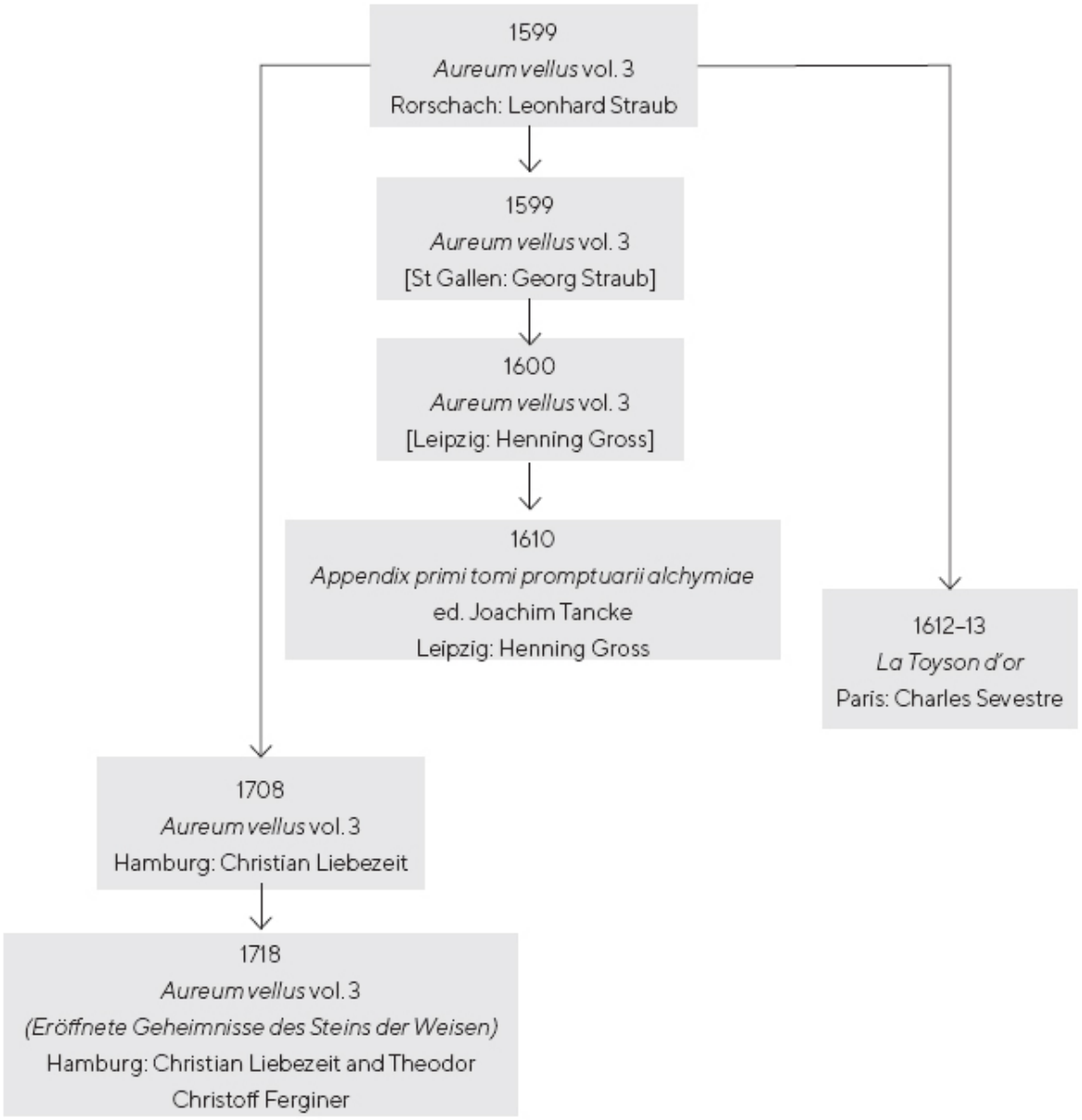

Figure 2: Early printed editions of works containing *Splendor solis.*

Surviving *Splendor solis* manuscripts

UNILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS

Jörg Völlnagel provided a catalogue with detailed descriptions of all the *Splendor solis* manuscripts he was able to find. It includes four items

without illustrations, certainly predating *Aureum vellus* (for full references see the list of manuscripts on page 54):

Leiden-Q6 – a collection of alchemical texts owned by Johann Albert Widmanstetter (1506–57) from Nellingen near Ulm, with Splendor solis in the middle, so its copy may be dated to before 1550.

Wolfenbüttel – with just two texts, the first being Spiegel der Alchemie ("A Mirror of Alchemy"), dated 1578.

Leiden-Q17 – a collection of treatises copied by Karl Widemann of Augsburg, with Splendor solis explicitly dated December 1595.

Prague – a copy of a collection of texts known from an earlier manuscript, with others (including Splendor solis) added after 1566 but not later than 1590.

Four more copies can now be added to this list, one of which (*Solothurn*) contains images similar to those in the printed *Aureum vellus* and thus is of crucial importance for reconstructing the genealogy of the treatise:

Copenhagen – contains three treatises, with Splendor solis in the middle, and a separate booklet signed by "Dauytt Stellein" of Ulm and dated 1576. The different hands of the main manuscript are estimated in the catalogue description to be from the 15th or 16th century, so this copy may possibly be dated to before 1550.

Solothurn – a large collection of alchemical treatises, opening with Splendor solis, illustrated with watercolour images similar to those in the printed Aureum vellus, and followed by numerous fragments from other works, partly illustrated with images from Rosarium philosophorum (some unfinished). The whole was bound in 1593 by Hans Ludwig Brem from Lindau am Bodensee for Felix Schmid (1539–97), Commander (Stadthauptmann) of Stein am Rhein, with the latter's monogram, name and coat-of-arms impressed on the cover and the arms also painted on the first folio. Schmid's monogram is also found on f.104r, under a German translation of a Latin poem at the top of the page, written in a different hand from Splendor solis and most of the

manuscript, clearly added later by the owner. The same hand reappears later in German translations of Latin fragments, so it may be assumed that Schmid purchased or inherited the volume containing Splendor solis, kept adding fragments from other works, and eventually had it bound in 1593. The date when the manuscript was begun cannot be estimated, but it must have been well before 1590, perhaps even around the middle of the century.

Kassel-11 – a collection with alchemical recipes, extracts and some copies of entire alchemical treatises by Johann Eckel, who served as secretary and "alchemical copyist and librarian" to Landgrave Maurice the Learned (1572–1632) (Moran 1991, 84). The texts were estimated to have been written between 1570 and 1610, but probably closer to the latter year. The collection includes the book of Lambspring (here dated 1553) with crude copies of its emblems and indications of colours, so certainly the version of Splendor solis Eckel used did not have illustrations (otherwise he would have copied them in the same way).

Munich – a volume containing six texts, of which Splendor solis is the first, followed by treatises in German attributed to Bernard of the Mark (otherwise known as Bernard of Treviso), Paracelsus (pseudepigraphic Thesaurus thesaurorum, first printed in 1574), a version of Rosarium philosophorum (Donum Dei), and two lesser-known texts, the second of which is dated 1578. This is probably the year in which the volume was completed, so Splendor solis must have been copied some time earlier. Before 1803 the manuscript was held in the library of St Augustine's Monastery in Munich, but its original owner is not known. The first folio with the title and part of the preface is missing, which explains why it had not been listed as a version of Splendor solis before Joachim Telle identified it as such in 2006.

All these compilations are quite different, indicating that in the second half of the 16th century *Splendor solis* was already widely known. The immediate source of the version published in *Aureum vellus* must have been closely related to the *Wolfenbüttel* and *Solothurn* manuscripts. The only other text in the former is *Spiegel der Alchemie*, which also appears in the Rorschach edition just after *Splendor solis*. However, the difference is that

the manuscript version does not ascribe *Spiegel der Alchemie* to any author, while in the printed book it is said to have been written by “Ulrich Poyselius”. There are no illustrations, but places where they should be are marked with the word “Figura”. In the *Solothurn* manuscript there are illustrations unmistakably similar to those in *Aureum vellus*, but two images are missing (“The Lunar Queen and the Solar King” and “The Alchemical Tree with Golden Boughs”), so the woodblocks could not have been modelled on this particular set, but rather must have been based on ones from a very close but more complete copy. Perhaps most importantly, only these two manuscripts have a short prayer-like invocation at the beginning (“Ich bin der Weeg unnd die Ebene Strassen…”), which also appears in *Aureum vellus*, but not in the illuminated manuscripts. Thus it must have been added to the common ancestor of the *Wolfenbüttel* and *Solothurn* versions, possibly in the 1560s or earlier (considering how much the two manuscripts differ otherwise).

One might be tempted to suspect that the *Leiden-Q17* manuscript was related to the *Aureum vellus* edition, because it was written by Karl Widemann, a well-known collector and copyist of alchemical texts, who even sold some of them to Emperor Rudolf II (1552– 1612) (Gilly 1994, Richterová 2016). Some of Widemann’s other surviving manuscripts contain texts attributed to Salomon Trismosin, Bartholomaeus Korndorffer and pseudo-Paracelsian treatises, many of which were also included in the Rorschach volumes. However, in his copy of *Splendor solis* the authorship is ascribed to “Ulricus Poyssel canonicus”, while *Spiegel der Alchemie* (written by him according to *Aureum vellus*) is not included. The earlier *Prague* manuscript likewise shows “Ulricus Poyssel canonicus” as the author, but contains a very different set of other texts, so the two versions must be related through a distant common ancestor, where that attribution was first inserted.

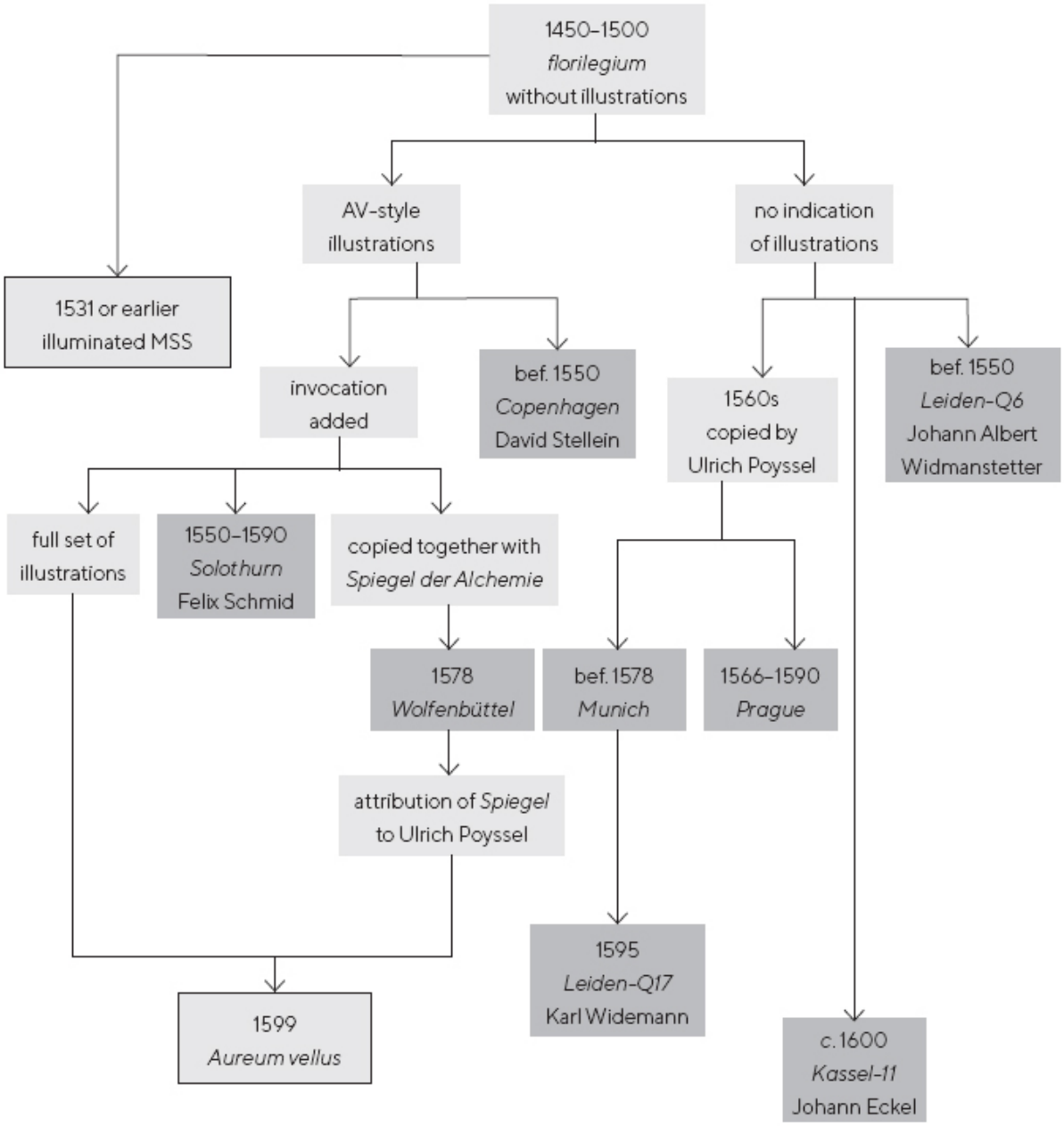

Figure 3: Surviving unilluminated *Splendor solis* manuscripts. Dark background indicates surviving manuscripts, light background shows hypothetical stages in manuscript transmission, while heavy borders mark the points of departure to the illuminated and printed versions.

Interestingly, the earliest two of the unillustrated manuscripts – *Leiden-Q6* and *Copenhagen* – are connected with the area of Ulm through their early owners, though they clearly belong to different traditions, as *Copenhagen* has places for illustrations marked with the word “Figura” (like *Wolfenbüttel*). Its owner, David Stellein, may have been a relative of Adam Stehlein, a banker in Ulm in the first half of the 17th century (Ribbert 1991,

121), but otherwise he remains unknown. Johann Albrecht Widmannstetter (1506–57), on the other hand, was a famous humanist and orientalist, secretary to two popes, and supporter of Copernicus. Nothing is known about his alchemical interests, while later he was an avid collector of oriental manuscripts, so may have acquired this one earlier in life when he was investigating different topics for his intellectual career. The manuscript is not written in his hand, which suggests it may even date to the early 16th century.

Finally, the *Kassel-11* manuscript of Johann Eckel is the most recent representative of the textual tradition in which the position of illustrations is not even indicated in the text by the word "Figura" or similar, to which also belong *Leiden-Q6*, *Munich*, *Prague* and *Leiden-Q17*. The lack of picture references in five manuscripts and as early as before 1550 clearly suggests that the text of *Splendor solis* may have originally been written without any intention of being illustrated, and that the images were added later. It was within a branch of that tradition that *Splendor solis* was attributed to Ulrich Poyssel, namely in *Prague* and *Leiden-Q17*. The title folio in Munich is missing, but it may have contained the same attribution, because Karl Widemann's manuscript includes all the same texts as *Munich*, copied in one block, but in a different order (on ff.67–125). It is not clear how *Spiegel der Alchemie* became linked to the name of Poyssel in *Aureum vellus*, but in *Wolfenbüttel* it is still anonymous. Obviously, confirming the analysis and initial conclusions presented above would require detailed comparison of the texts in all the surviving versions.

ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS

Turning to the most impressive, artistically executed manuscripts, for which *Splendor solis* is best known, there are seven of them dated to before 1600 or thereabouts. All are beautifully written and painted on parchment and – except for *Kassel-21* – constitute separate codices, without any other texts. Jörg Völlnagel described and compared six of them in great detail, presenting a convincing genealogy (Völlnagel 2004, 137). There can be no doubt that they all stem from the same root manuscript, as the scenes of *Planetenkinder* ("Children of the Planets") are unique to alchemical art and are so similar to one another. The exception is the unfinished *Philadelphia*

manuscript, but its other features prove it belongs to the same family. In mostly chronological order they are the following:

Berlin-78D3 – has the title page and three images missing, and another image inserted on a modern folio after the manuscript had been purchased from the collection of Rodolphe Kann in 1903. Earlier owners are not known. It is dated on two miniatures 1531 and 1532, with one scholar's reading of the former year as 1535 (Hartlaub 1937, 146).

Nuremberg – architectural motifs in some of the ornamental borders have been changed to flower and bird motifs, a modification that has been followed in the three manuscripts descending from this one. Its provenance is unknown, but it is dated 1545.

Paris-113 – has been in the Bibliothèque Nationale since 1860. Previously, it was held in the Museum der Technologie in Vienna, founded by Johann Ferdinand von Schönfeld in 1799 (Scheiger 1824), and before that it was part of the collection of Emperor Rudolf II, who had a longstanding interest in alchemy. Völlnagel, following information from Isabelle Delaunay, the Paris library curator, misinterpreted Schönfeld as referring to the town of that name, which led him to doubt the authenticity of Rudolf II's signature on f.2 and Schönfeld's statement on f.1 that the codex was "Kaiser Rudolphs des II. Goldmacherbuch" ("Emperor Rudolf II's alchemical book"). In fact, it is quite certain that this manuscript had belonged to Rudolf, because Schönfeld (a member of a rich family of book printers and sellers in Prague) purchased part of Rudolf's collection in 1790, which later formed the foundation of his museum (Mikuletzky 1999). The manuscript is dated 1577 by Rudolf II, which may be the year of purchase or the year in which the manuscript was produced for him.

London – belonged to Edward Harley, second Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer (1689–1741), and was purchased in 1753 by the British government for the British Library. Harley's inscription indicates that he received it from someone (the name was later removed) who had bought it from one Mrs Priemer, "niece to the famous Mr Cyprianus whose book it was". It has been assumed that the person in question was

Johannes Cyprian (1642–1723) of Rawicz in Poland, a theologian at the University of Leipzig. However, meticulous research of the manuscript's provenance carried out by Peter Kidd could not confirm this identification or explain how his niece might have brought it to England. On the contrary, Kidd uncovered chronological problems with the identification, as the manuscript was certainly in the hands of Harley before the death of Cyprian (Kidd 2011). What is more, it is unlikely that Harley would consider a German theologian from faraway Leipzig to be "famous". Even though Cyprian published much, his works were neither controversial nor widely read, so it would be surprising if the English aristocrat had even heard of him, let alone regarded him as famous. An alternative "Mr Cyprianus" may be proposed, someone who was much closer and indeed much more famous: William Laud (1573–1645), Archbishop of Canterbury. Laud's biography, written by Peter Heylin (1599–1662), was published posthumously in 1668 under the title Cyprianus anglicus ("The English Cyprian"). That name alluded both to Laud's use of the writings of St Cyprian in his teachings and the martyr's death that both he and St Cyprian met. Harley would probably have known that book, and his failure to name Laud openly in his note is consistent with his later removal of the name of the anonymous donor of the book. Such a hypothesis gathers weight when it is remembered that Archbishop Laud himself brought a large number of manuscripts from Germany and received many more from Henry Howard, 22nd Earl of Arundel (1608–52), who likewise tried to save them from destruction during the Thirty Years' War (Buringh 2011, 213–14). The collection was donated to the University of Oxford in 1639, but "Cyprianus" did retain some items, as confirmed in his last will, where he gives to St John's College in Oxford "all such Bookes as I have in my study at the time of my death" (Bruce 1841, 63). Laud was the only child of his parents, but had numerous half-siblings from his mother's earlier marriage and listed his nephews and nieces in the will. There is no "Mrs Priemer", but Priemer may have been the name of a later husband or she may have been a great-niece, not yet listed (Bruce 1841, 63–4). The manuscript is dated 1582 on three folios and is, in Völlnagel's opinion, a very close copy of the Nuremberg manuscript.

Berlin-42 – is the latest of the copies discussed here, produced around 1600 or even later. It was in the collection of the Kurfürstliche Bibliothek in Berlin (founded in 1661) at least from 1746, when Johann Karl Wilhelm Moehsen described it in his catalogue of medical manuscripts in the Royal Library in Berlin (Moehsen 1746, 1–6). He discussed possible mentions of it in earlier sources, but discarded them as referring to other manuscripts. What is more, he even compared the text to that published in Aureum vellus and indicated some errors in the printed version.

Kassel-21 – is in a different category from the other illuminated manuscripts, in that it forms part of a collection of five treatises, with Splendor solis being the fourth. The whole volume is elegantly written in the same hand and the other texts also have interesting illustrations. Purchased by one of the Landgraves of Hesse-Kassel in the first half of the 18th century, the manuscript was badly damaged during World War II and even after restoration parts of some miniatures are missing. The images are set in frames or architectural portals, without the decorative borders of flowers and birds, so were probably copied directly from Berlin-78D3 or an unknown intermediary. The artistic quality is noticeably lower than that displayed in the other manuscripts, but still remarkably high. The manuscript is dated 1588.

Philadelphia – was purchased by the University of Pennsylvania in 1952 and is not included in Völlnagel's catalogue. It contains the full text of Splendor solis but no images, with full-page blank spaces left for them and modern pencil inscriptions (19th or early 20th century) identifying the pictures that should be there. There are more recent notes in German with reference to the British Library manuscript on the inside front cover, where there is also pasted a printed label from a German library with the former call number. The calligraphy is most impressive, more Gothic and less ornate than in the other descendants of Berlin-78D3, which may suggest its early age. The manuscript has not been completed, but it was clearly intended to become a spectacular work of art. The library catalogue dates it to the 16th century.

Two later copies may be briefly mentioned. The first of these is dated 1582 and was sold at an auction in Paris in 1884, and inspected by Gustav

Friedrich Hartlaub in 1937 in a private collection in Bern, Switzerland (Hartlaub 1937, 148). Most probably it is a copy of the *London* manuscript (as suggested by the date), made on paper some time after 1617 and with two images added (Völlnagel 2004, 173). The other is the early 18th-century paper manuscript *Paris-12297*, which contains the French text from *La Toyson d'or* and images copied from one of the illuminated 16th-century versions, with the frames and borders modified to include alchemical and Freemasonic symbolism. Various other later copies (sometimes of the images only) and translations, most of which are described in detail by Völlnagel, may be dispensed with here.

There are two remaining fundamental questions relating to the genealogy of *Splendor solis*. Was it an illustrated treatise from the very beginning or were the images added to a preexisting text? And which images came first – the artistic miniatures or the crude drawings later printed in *Aureum vellus*? The premier authority on *Splendor solis*, Jörg Völlnagel, after extensive studies of most copies, arrived at the conclusion that it was originally designed as an artistic object, with both text and images masterminded by one person and executed by a small number of artists (probably just two: the scribe and the painter). He also concluded that *Berlin-78D3* is actually the archetype or the original exemplar from which all the others descended.

However, other authorities on alchemical manuscripts argued that the text predated the illustrations, having been written in the second half of the 15th century (Broszinski 1994, 39; Horchler 2005, 153–154; Telle 2006, 425). The existence of five manuscripts without any indication of illustrations seems to confirm that contention, in which case images must have been added later. Originally they must have been crude, as in *Solothurn* and later in *Aureum vellus*, because had they been copied from one of the illuminated manuscripts, it would be expected there would be at least some indication of the planetary correlations of the seven flasks, assuming that copying the whole *Planetenkinder* scenes was beyond the skills of the amateur artist working on them. Without their chariots or personifications in the background, nor even a symbol (except for Jupiter), the *Solothurn* pictures do seem derived from an early version, which was at some point (in or before 1531) converted into a magnificent manuscript.

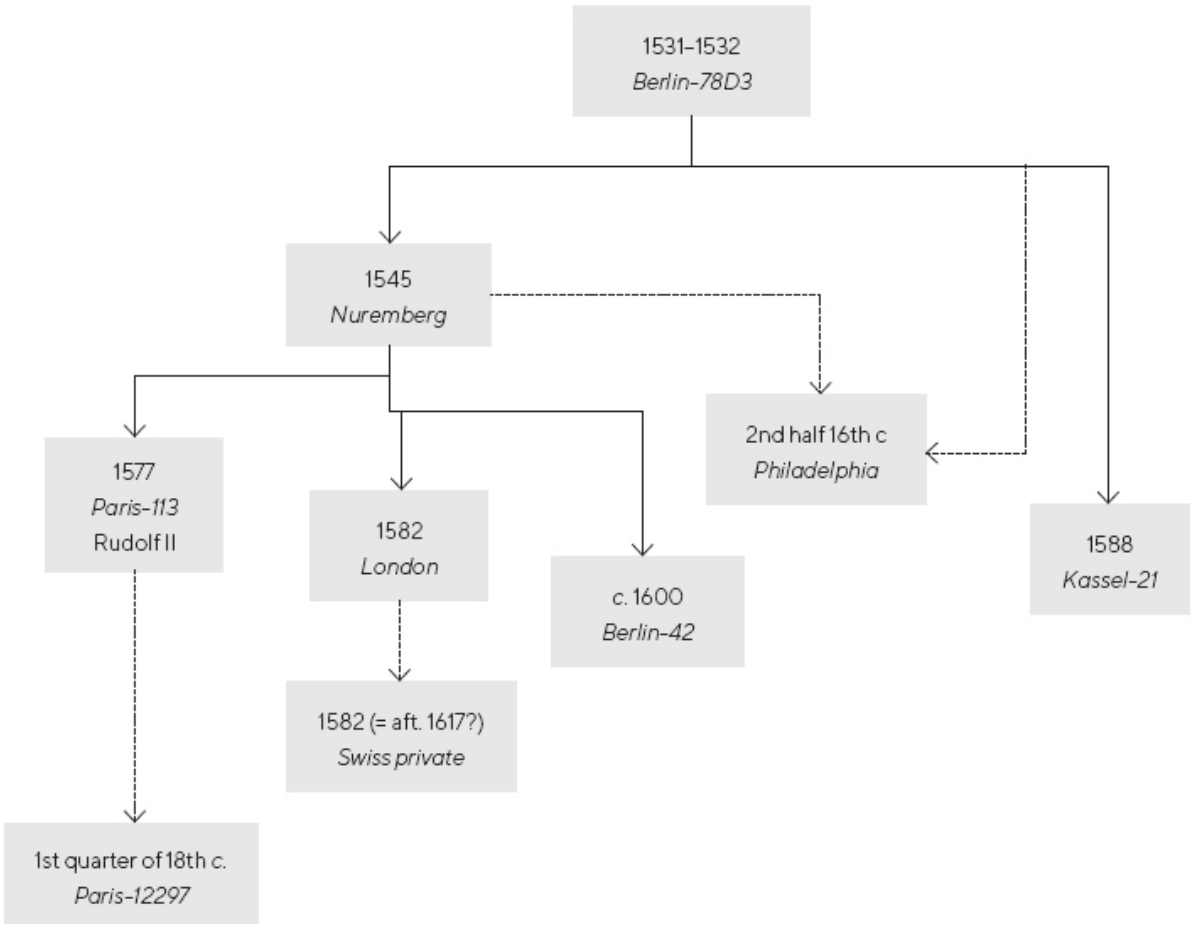

Figure 4: Surviving illuminated *Splendor solis* manuscripts. Solid lines denote highly probable relationships between manuscripts, whereas links between manuscripts connected by dashed lines are less certain.

Who wrote the *Splendor solis* text?

As with any other unattributed literary or artistic work, the question of authorship is fundamental but not always possible to answer with any degree of certainty. In the case of Splendor solis, there are two candidates. Salomon Trismosin is most often claimed as the author in modern scholarly works, but only those published after 1920, when the English translation of Julius Kohn caused this attribution to be widely and unreflectively accepted. Carl Gustav Jung's widely read books on alchemical symbolism consolidated the notion that Trismosin was the author of *Splendor solis* (Jung 1980, passim; Holmyard 1957, 158, figs. 30–32; Lennep 1985, 110–

129; Gabriele 1997, 158, 173). However, earlier scholars never mentioned such an attribution (Lenglet du Fresnoy 1742, Schmieder 1832, Kopp 1886, Ferguson 1906). As already discussed, the treatises published under the fictitious name of Trismosin in *Aureum vellus* did not include *Splendor solis*, which was in a separate volume, but, in the French translation of the latter, it remained on the title page (and the frontispiece), either by mistake or to increase interest in the treatise.

The second candidate is Ulrich Poyssel, a canon, to whom the authorship of *Splendor solis* is ascribed in the *Prague* and *Leiden-Q17* manuscripts. In *Aureum vellus* the same name ("Ulrich Poysel") appears as the author of *Spiegel der Alchemie*, printed right after *Splendor solis*. Here he is described as a priest at the Bavarian court, who died in 1471 and was buried in the "Mannssminster" in the Palatinate. Jörg Völlnagel dismissed the claims of both manuscripts as resulting from a confusion caused by linking the author of the second work with the first one when it was copied from an earlier manuscript, which is possible. However, his key argument was that the text of *Splendor solis* did not exist in 1471, which is not so obvious (Völlnagel 2004, 30–31). What he did not take into account was that the confusion could equally have been the other way round. So it was still felt necessary to verify the identity of Ulrich Poyssel.

This task was attempted by Joachim Telle, who found out that members of the local noble family Poyssel von Loifling were indeed buried in their chapel of the Chammünster monastery in the Palatinate. One of them was named Ulrich and was the ducal tax collector in the city of Cham between the years 1448 and 1475 (Telle 2006, 431). Further research shows that Ulrich in fact died in 1494, not 1471. In the chapel there is a stained-glass window with his name, coat-of-arms and the year 1471, alongside the arms of four other persons with the same year, but presumably this is the year in which the chapel was adopted as the burial place for the four families, not the year in which any of these four people died (Hager 1906, 52–53; Parello 2015, 369). These findings make it seem that this Ulrich Poyssel is the right person.

However, as Telle discovered, there was another Ulrich Poyssel, active in the 1560s at the court of Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria, who apparently wrote

two alchemical treatises: *De summo philosophorum ovo sive termino* (“On the Highest Egg or Limit of the Philosophers”) and *De arte sacra liber* (“The Book on the Sacred Art”). An old catalogue of chemical books in the Stuttgart Hauptstaatsarchiv lists *Clavis super librum Ulrici Poisseli, qui dicitur Splendor Solis* (“Key to Ulrich Poyssel’s Book, Which Is Called *Splendor Solis*”). This certainly refers to the same person and therefore shows that he was a copyist and interpreter of *Splendor solis*, rather than the author, because the treatise had been written at least 30 years before, and probably much earlier (Telle 2006, 431–32).

The name of Poyssel also appears as an author of alchemical instructions used by Archbishop Ernst of Bavaria (1554–1612) and – most interestingly – quoted in Pseudo-Alexander von Suchten’s treatise *Explicatio tincturae physicorum Theophrasti Paracelsi* (“Explication of the Physicians’ Tincture of Theophrastus Paracelsus”), which is included in Karl Widemann’s *Leiden-Q17* manuscript. Later published by Widemann’s close friend Benedictus Figulus, the text first quotes from one Conrad Poysselius, “Theophrasti Familiarissimo” (“the closest friend of Theophrastus [Paracelsus]”) and then, listing suggested further reading, names “*Udalrici Poysselii Splendorem Solis*” as the second title after Pseudo-Paracelsus’s *Tinctura physicorum* (Figulus 1608, 205, 210).

Thus it becomes clear that this Ulrich Poyssel either pretended to have written *Splendor solis* or – more probably – owned a copy signed by himself, which he lent to be copied by others and which caused his name to become attached to the text, possibly travelling together with *Spiegel der Alchemie*. The *Wolfenbüttel* manuscript comprises these two works, but with no mention of Poyssel, so it represents a different line of descent in the same manuscript tradition. At some point a copyist familiar with the Chammünster monastery must have identified Poyssel with the earlier Ulrich and assumed that the year 1471 on the stained-glass window was the year of his death. The mention of Conrad Poyssel, a supposed friend or student of Paracelsus (maybe intended to be Ulrich’s father), added to the growing legend of Paracelsus as the arch-alchemist.

Thus the alchemical enthusiast who compiled the *florilegium* will have to remain anonymous, just like so many other authors of alchemical writings.

Who created the *Splendor solis* illustrations?

Art historians have speculated for nearly a century as to who may have been responsible for the design and execution of the primary model for the *Splendor solis* illuminated manuscripts, including the idea to incorporate *Planetenkinder* scenes.

The first to study *Splendor solis* from this perspective was Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub (1884–1963), who was famous for coining the term New Objectivity to describe the post-expressionist movement in 1920s German art. In his paper of 1937 he proposed that the *Splendor solis* miniatures were the work of the Nuremberg circle of artists, the school of Albrecht Dürer and his disciples. As for particular artists, Hartlaub suggested that the seven images with alchemical flasks may have been painted by Nikolaus Glockendon (1490/1495–1533/1534), while the remaining images could have been the work of Hans Sebald Beham (1500–50) or Georg Pencz (*c*. 1500–50), or someone from their workshops (Hartlaub 1937, 148–158).

Four decades later, the French historian of alchemy René Alleau showed that the *Planetenkinder* scenes were based on the etchings of Hans Sebald Beham (sometimes also ascribed to Pencz, which Alleau disregarded), so he must have been the main artist, perhaps helped by Nikolaus Glockendon and his younger brother Albrecht (Alleau 1975, 265–85).

Two different hypotheses were presented by Jacques van Lennep. First he ascribed the *Splendor solis* illustrations to the circle of Dutch mannerists remaining under Italian influence, such as Bernard van Orley, Lancelot Blondeel, Lambert Lombard and Jan van Scorel (Lennep 1966, 50–61). Some two decades later he radically changed his opinion, deciding that the main artist was Albrecht Glockendon, with Beham responsible for the background scenes and Simon Bening (1481–1561), a Flemish master, the borders with flowers and birds (Lennep 1985, 111–14).

In her monograph on Albrecht Glockendon, Barbara Daentler likewise argued that he was the creator of at least some of the miniatures (Daentler 1984, 102–108). All those scholars agreed that the manuscript was produced for Albrecht of Brandenburg (1490–1545), Archbishop of Mainz.

A different opinion was expressed by Ulrich Merkl, who believed that Albrecht of Brandenburg's elder brother Joachim I Nestor (1484–1535) commissioned the work and that Georg Pencz was the contractor, who painted all the images (Merkl 1999, 498–502). This was not generally accepted and Stanislas Klossowski de Rola in his unpublished two-volume study of *Splendor solis* maintained that Albrecht Glockendon was the original designer and painter. Klossowski de Rola extended his hypothesis to include all the other illuminated codices, which, in his opinion, were produced by other members of the Glockendon family. So, for example, the 1582 *London* manuscript in the British Library would have been the work of Gabriel Glockendon (*c*. 1515–*c*. 95), son of Nikolaus (Klossowski de Rola 2004).

In the most recent extended study of *Splendor solis* artwork, Jörg Völlnagel rejected its ascription to the Nuremberg school in favour of the Augsburg school of Hans Holbein the Elder (*c*. 1465–1524) and his disciples. Comparing characteristic features of the works of various artists in that group, he eventually concluded that all the miniatures were painted by Jörg Breu the Elder (*c*. 1475–1537), a student of Hans Burgkmair the Elder (1473–1531).

However, Völlnagel's arguments were not strong enough to convince everyone. Joachim Telle described Völlnagel's hypothesis that the *Berlin-78D3* manuscript was the original archetype as "risky" and doubted the attribution to Breu (Telle 2006, 426).

Also Michael Roth, the curator of the Kupferstichkabinett (where the *Berlin-78D3* manuscript is held) and the Berlin *Splendor solis* exhibition of 2005, rejected Völlnagel's assumptions, stating that "the multifaceted history of the miniatures' attribution claims" shows how extraordinarily difficult it is to ascribe a particular artist to them. In his opinion so little is known about southern German and Austrian book painters that "there is still hope for fundamental discoveries that will change our point of view" (Roth, Metze and Kunz 2005, 15).

A GENEALOGICAL APPROACH TO THE MYSTERY

While not claiming a fundamental discovery that would definitively solve the mystery of the *Splendor solis* illuminations, an attempt to approach it from a genealogical point of view may be briefly presented here. The hypothesis begins with the *Solothurn* manuscript, so far entirely unnoticed by other scholars – except for its existence being signalled by Telle (Telle 2006, 430). As already mentioned, it is the only known manuscript version with illustrations that predates the printed *Aureum vellus* and is closely related to it. Its quality is remarkably better than that of the unillustrated copies, but far inferior to the illuminated ones.

The earliest-known owner was Felix Schmid, a wealthy merchant from Stein am Rhein, who had it luxuriously bound in 1593 and added some other texts (with his translations from Latin into German) after *Splendor solis*. He was also the treasurer of the town and its military commander, with trade contacts in Augsburg, Nuremberg, Ulm, Zurich and other major cities of the region. Frieda Maria Huggenberg's fascinating study of the 16thcentury Swiss alchemical milieu shows that Schmid was a member of a "philosophical society", mostly preoccupied with alchemy, in the nearby town of Schaffhausen (Huggenberg 1956). It was founded by his cousin Johann Conrad Meyer, known as "the learned mayor", whose interest in alchemy may have been started through his friendship with the St Gallen alchemists Tobias and David (1531–99) Schobinger. Tobias and David were sons of the famous Bartholomeus (1500–85), a friend and admirer of Paracelsus, whom he first met in 1528, and collector of his writings and correspondence (Gamper and Hofmeier 2014).

Meyer's contacts with the alchemical network of the Schobingers became even stronger when he married their cousin Helena Stauder, a niece of Bartholomeus. Felix Schmid was likewise related to Meyer and other members of the Schaffhausen alchemical circle through kinship and four marriages, including the Heinzel brothers, immigrants from Augsburg who turned out to be swindlers. Huggenberg even found a document with a testimony of their misdeeds written by Schmid (Huggenberg 1956, 120–23), as well as a mass of genealogical data documenting close family ties among the Swiss patrician alchemists. As she observed, many of them absorbed the love of alchemy from their fathers when still very young, or through their wives, who were often similarly interested in natural sciences.

The father of Felix Schmid, the owner of the *Solothurn* manuscript, was Felix the Elder (*c*. 1490–1563?), a mayor of Stein am Rhein, and his mother was Elisabeth Stokar from Schaffhausen, a cousin of the region's chief alchemist, Johann Conrad Meyer. However, what is even more interesting in the context of the *Splendor solis* illuminations is that a close cousin of Felix's father, Thomas Schmid alias Glaser (*c*. 1490–1555/1560), was a renowned painter. Born in Schaffhausen, Thomas was most probably a son of Hans Schmid, a glassmaker and glass painter, supposedly Felix the Elder's uncle, as they all used the same coat-of-arms and Thomas painted Felix's portrait as early as 1515 (Frauenfelder 1958, 225–63; Fabian 1965, 14–15, 59; Andreänszky 1972). His main known undertaking were the frescoes of his own general design in the main hall of St George's Abbey in Stein am Rhein (1515–16), on which he worked together with Ambrosius Holbein (*c*. 1494–*c*. 1519) and Conrad Apotheker alias Schnitt (1495/1500–41), possibly with some help from Nikolaus Manuel alias Deutsch (1484–1530). Another grand mural attributed to Schmid is the facade of the White Eagle house in Stein, dated to 1522–23 (Hesse 1998).

Many features in Thomas Schmid's style show an influence from the Augsburg school, which would certainly have come from the Holbeins (one painting in St George's Abbey in fact depicts a gathering of those artists around Hans Holbein the Younger, Ambrosius's brother, and their father, Hans the Elder, curiously also including Felix Schmid the Elder). Interestingly, in the opinion of art historians, Thomas Schmid was also influenced by the "Planets" series of woodcuts by Hans Burgkmair the Elder, the master of Jörg Breu (Tanner 1990, 27). This suggests that it was Schmid, not Breu, who was responsible for the *Splendor solis* illuminations, especially as he is so closely linked (genealogically and socially) to the owner of the *Solothurn* manuscript.

A number of features in the murals of Thomas Schmid are indeed reminiscent of the *Splendor solis* images, as are the *putti* in Ambrosius Holbein's *Mary with the Child* (1514) and especially the coat-of-arms in an architectural portal painted (1523) on the matriculation list of the University of Basel by Conrad Apotheker (Völlnagel 2004, 115). The latter is not only very similar to the *Arma artis* miniature, but is made on parchment, as are all the illuminated copies of *Splendor solis*. Most importantly, it is also very

similar to the painting *Massacre of the Innocents* by Thomas Schmid himself, some features of which bear a striking resemblance to the images in *Splendor solis* (Tanner 1990). Nothing is known about any of these painters being interested in alchemy but it seems quite likely, considering that Apotheker and Manuel were both sons of apothecary-pharmacists, and thus well equipped with technical laboratory skills and perhaps also alchemical theory. And Thomas Schmid, as the son of a glassmaker, would certainly have known about "mastering fire".

Besides genealogy, there is also an intriguing heraldic connection, although it is not quite clear how to interpret it. A glass painting from Stein am Rhein (today known only from an old photograph) by Daniel Lindtmayer the Younger (1552–bef. 1607) from Schaffhausen, dated 1576, shows Felix Schmid the Younger (the *Splendor solis* owner) with his last wife and coats-of-arms of all four of his wives (Boesch 1939, 40, plate 25). His first wife was Maria Guttenson von Sonnenberg and her coat-of-arms is almost exactly the same as the *Arma artis*, displaying the sun in the shield (with five mounts at the bottom) and in the crest. This is obviously a depiction of her surname, which means "Solar Mountain". It apparently cannot have influenced the original *Splendor solis* design because Maria's father, Hans Guttenson (d. 1568), a famous mint master from St Gallen and Zürich, started using the surname "von Sonnenberg" only after purchasing the castle of that name in 1561 (Hahn 1913). As already mentioned, the solar arms already appear in two copies of *Aurora consurgens*, of which the earlier one (Nelahozeves, VI Fd 26) is dated to circa 1450 and the later (Leiden, VC F. 29) to before 1526 (Crisciani and Pereira 2008). This, by the way, challenges Völlnagel's claim that the author of *Splendor solis* used a particular manuscript with a German translation of *Aurora consurgens* (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Cod. germ. qu. 848); the manuscript in question does not have the *Arma artis* miniature, so he must have had access to at least one other copy.

This proposed solution to the puzzle of who created the *Splendor solis* miniatures is obviously a far-fetched working hypothesis. It shows some clues pointing to Thomas Schmid and his circle of friends from the Augsburg school of Holbein, thus remaining within the milieu proposed by Jörg Völlnagel. The strong point here is the link to the owner of the

Solothurn manuscript, which was certainly copied from an earlier version that must have been the model for the original illuminated design. Whether it was the *Berlin-78D3* manuscript or an even earlier archetype is another matter. For the time being, it bears repeating these words of Michael Roth: “Thus, the book continues to honour its hermetic content. It retains its secrets. It remains to be hoped that further insights and connections to other works can be made in the future, which will finally wrest from the *Splendor solis* […] the mystery of its creation and thus set the unrestricted search for the Philosophers’ Stone on new grounds.” (Roth, Metze and Kunz 2005, 16).

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Manuscripts

The list of manuscripts mentioned in the text includes all known pre-1600 copies.

ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS

Berlin-78D3 – Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Cod. 78 D 3 (41 folios)

Berlin-42 – Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Cod. germ. f.42 (67 folios)

Kassel-21 – Universitätsbibliothek Kassel, Landerbibliothek und Murhardsche Bibliothek der Stadt Kassel, 2° Ms. chem. 21 (on ff.63–116)

London – British Library, Harley Ms. 3469 (48 folios)

Nuremberg – Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 4° Hs. 146 766 (48 folios)

Paris-113 – Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. allemand 113 (49 folios)

Paris-12297 – Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. français 12297 (85 folios)

Philadelphia – University of Pennsylvania, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Edgar F. Smith Memorial Collection, Ms. Codex 108 (41 folios)

Swiss private (1937 in a private collection in Bern, probably post-1617 copy of London manuscript)

OTHER MANUSCRIPTS

Kassel-11 – Universitätsbibliothek Kassel, Landesbibliothek und Murhardsche Bibliothek der Stadt Kassel, 2° Ms. chem. 11[4] (on ff.134–47)

Copenhagen – Det Kongelige Bibliotek, GKS 3508 oktav (on ff.14v–33)

Leiden-Q6 – Rijksuniversiteit Bibliotheek, Cod. Voss. Chym. Q. 6 (on ff.49v–77)

Leiden-Q17 – Rijksuniversiteit Bibliotheek, Cod. Voss. Chym. Q. 17 (on ff.99v–125)

Munich – Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Hss Cgm 4228 (on ff.II–XLIIII)

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[1] Fictuld 1740, 98, nr 132; the second expanded edition of 1753, p.147, nr 160, has slightly different wording with the same meaning.

[2] Petrus Bonus is referred to by the name of Ferrarius elsewhere in *Splendor solis*, which shows that the author of *Splendor solis* must have known his work.

Inventing an Alchemical Adept: Splendor Solis and the Paracelsian Movement

Georgiana Hedesan

INTRODUCTION

In 1598, the first volume of a curious work entitled *Aureum vellus oder Guldin Schatz und Kunstkammer* (“The Golden Fleece or the Golden Treasure and Cabinet”) appeared in Rorschach, a small town on Lake Constance in Switzerland. The contents section of the volume promised that two more would appear in due course; in fact, five volumes were eventually to emerge between 1598 and 1604, with the first three printed in Rorschach and the last two in Basel.[1] *Aureum vellus* was an edited collection of treatises and recipes by various authors, out of which one name stood out, that of the alchemist Salomon Trismosin.

Today, we know of Salomon Trismosin only as the fictional author of the beautifully illustrated alchemical treatise entitled *Splendor solis*. This work featured in the third volume of *Aureum vellus*, but was not attributed to Trismosin in the original version. As will further be shown, the association between *Splendor solis* and Trismosin was made for the first time in 1612 in a French edition. However, it was Julius Kohn’s 1920 edition of *Splendor solis* that propelled Trismosin into modern consciousness.

The Rorschach editor of *Aureum vellus*, identified as the Swiss printer Leonhard Straub (1550–1601), clearly intended his publishing project to sit under the spiritual patronage of Trismosin. As such, its initial success hinged on Trismosin’s acceptance as a previously unknown but great alchemical philosopher. The strategy was risky but not unusual in the

period: it was around this time that other previously unknown alchemical authorities were being established. Moreover, the figure of Trismosin came with a very special commendation: as the cover of *Aureum vellus* claimed, he had been the “preceptor of Theophrastus Paracelsus”. This was, of course, the Swiss physician and philosopher Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim (1493–1541), who called himself Paracelsus. He was at the height of his fame toward the end of the 16th century, with his unorthodox writings making him the object of huge controversy in literate circles around Europe.

Aureum vellus was evidently seeking to capitalize on Paracelsus’s notoriety to advance, in turn, the unlikely figure of Trismosin, and to attract readers to the entire publication project. In doing this, Straub was not only motivated by financial considerations; research has shown that he was associated with at least two stalwart followers of Paracelsus (Telle 2006, 436–7). As such, it was Paracelsus and the Paracelsian movement that we have to thank for bringing *Splendor solis* to a public audience. The present contribution will take a historical look at how *Splendor solis* fitted within the early modern Paracelsian framework, by considering the movement’s attempt to integrate Paracelsus within an ancient wisdom line.

The search for ancient wisdom

By the turn of the 17th century, the Renaissance was gradually coming to an end. Today, we mainly think of the Renaissance in terms of great artists like Raphael and Michelangelo, but there was more to the period than painting. At the core of the Renaissance project stood the recovery of “forgotten” ancients. Humanist scholars sought them chiefly in ancient Greece and Rome, but occasionally they searched further afield. Thus, the foremost Renaissance philosophers, particularly Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), his pupil Pico della Mirandola (1463–94), and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535), believed that true philosophy – or wisdom (Lat. *sapientia*) – ultimately originated in the “East”, an uncertain geographical area that was usually thought to comprise Egypt, the Middle East, sometimes India and, less commonly, China.

Ficino set this recovery of Eastern wisdom under the name of an ancient philosopher that was known to the Middle Ages: Hermes Trismegistus, or Hermes the Thrice-Learned.[2] Hermes was supposed to have lived in ancient Egypt and to have been roughly contemporary with the biblical Moses. We now know that Trismegistus never existed, and that he was a late antique conflation of the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian god Thoth. Under his name a corpus of wisdom literature flourished, the *Corpus Hermeticum* – but the Middle Ages were familiar with little of it. It was Ficino who, upon getting possession of the Greek manuscripts of the *Corpus Hermeticum,* set upon the task of recovering Hermes for the Latin world. Under his influence, Hermes became one of the chief forefathers of ancient wisdom, with some even proclaiming his authority as supreme. Most Renaissance alchemists looked upon him as the founder of their art, due to the popularity of a brief but highly influential treatise attributed to Trismegistus, the *Emerald Tablet* (*Tabula smaragdina*).

Yet the notion of an ancient wisdom, usually termed *prisca sapientia* ("old wisdom") or *prisca theologia* ("old theology"), was also an inclusive one.[3] Its followers believed that *prisca sapientia* encompassed a line of philosophers who had some form of access to divine truths. This view was quintessentially late antique, but had survived in the medieval period, particularly among alchemists. As an example, the 10th-century Arabic treatise *Turba philosophorum* ("The Assembly of Philosophers") featured an imaginary reunion of ancient Greek sages, including Socrates, Pythagoras and Plato. The treatise aimed to show that, despite their different terms and doctrines, all philosophers referred to the same truth.

This view was also favoured in the Renaissance, and fostered rich cultural developments. Intellectuals like Pico and Agrippa focused on harmonizing ostensibly disparate philosophies. Others engaged themselves to the task of uncovering, translating, re-editing or explaining various pieces of ancient philosophy. An increasing amount of material found its way to the public via an explosion of publishing houses. This virtuous cycle led to the accumulation of huge amounts of information; eventually, it profoundly altered the cultural landscape, contributing to the rise of the modern world.

Yet the *prisca sapientia* approach had its critics. Surely not all philosophies were similar, or could be reconciled: after all, Aristotle (384–322 BCE) had spent a great amount of time disputing the validity of pre-Socratic philosophy or even of that of Plato (428/427–348/347 BCE). Some could point out that philosophers more often quarrelled than accepted each other's views.

Even if all natural philosophy could be reconciled, there were also problems related to religious matters. After all, in the Middle Ages, theologians made an exceptional effort to harmonize Christian faith with one specific philosophy – Aristotelianism. If Aristotelianism was to be replaced by an inclusive but hazy form of universal philosophy, how was the relationship between the earthly and the divine to be redefined? Christian belief certainly held that the Judeo-Christian revelation superseded ancient philosophy, and that the Bible reigned supreme over it. An examination of the virtues of any philosophy could only start from biblical principles.

Most Renaissance philosophers accepted this: indeed, one of the key arguments of Ficino and Pico on behalf of the *prisca sapientia* was that ancient wisdom at its best was in line with the Bible, and even foresaw the coming of Christ. Yet nobody could be fooled into thinking that all ancient philosophers accepted the Judaeo-Christian authority; Aristotle certainly did not, while Galen (129–*c*. 200/216), the "prince of physicians", openly disdained Christians. For this reason, Ficino and Pico themselves favoured specific philosophers, such as Plato and Hermes Trismegistus, over others. Later *prisca sapientia* supporters began to openly exclude some figures from their lineage: Aristotle and Galen, in particular, fell foul of it.

The impact of religion on philosophy during this period is often overlooked. Yet the Renaissance overlapped the era of the Reformation, and the project of Christian renewal touched upon many philosophers as well. This translated into new attempts at integrating Christianity with philosophy that took many shapes and forms. Some were restricted to the promotion of Christian virtues within philosophy, others proposed the re-examination of natural philosophy through the lens of the Genesis account; yet others focused on the "Christianizing" of pagan philosophy.

The reformation of Paracelsus and his “adept philosophy”

Perhaps no one expressed the Reformation spirit in philosophy better than Paracelsus, called even during his lifetime “the Luther of physicians” (Paracelsus 2008, 91). Historians have long had trouble making sense of him, not only because of the imperfections of his writings, but particularly because he defied categorization. For some, he is a reformer of medicine and chemistry; for others, a precursor of modern science; some describe him as a backwardlooking alchemist or an irrational troublemaker, others, as a radical Christian reformer (Webster 2008, Weeks 1997, Goldammer 1986, Pagel 1982, Sudhoff 1894–1899). He was perhaps all of these things and more, dabbling in all domains of knowledge of the era with boundless enthusiasm and fierce radicalism. Among his chief preoccupations were, undoubtedly, medicine and Christianity, often seen as one and the same thing. He saw himself as embodying the highest ideal of the Christian physician, and sought the profound transformation of medicine by means of the art of alchemy.

Paracelsus’s aim of reforming medicine included a rejection of most, if not all, medical authorities. As a lecturer at the University of Basel, he famously threw the standard medical textbooks of the era into a public bonfire. Promptly kicked out of town, he ended up roaming the Holy Roman Empire, before coming to an abrupt end in Salzburg, apparently due to mercury poisoning. Paracelsus vehemently criticized Galen, the foremost medical authority of the time, as well as other revered physicians like Avicenna (980–1037). Paracelsus proclaimed the supremacy of experience and personal observation over authority, and maintained that the true purveyors of knowledge were unlearned artisans and outcasts such as gypsies.

Such revolutionary rhetoric and rejection of authority make him seem completely opposed to the Renaissance project. Yet, when one looks at the substance of Paracelsus’s thought, there is much in common between it and other Renaissance philosophy such as that of Pico, Ficino and Agrippa. They all draw on ancient and medieval traditions like those of learned

magic, theories of signatures and alchemy. More than other Renaissance philosophers, however, Paracelsus sought to innovate on these, in order to give them a deeper philosophical and religious grounding. In doing so, he was more original than, and different from, all of these philosophers, but not necessarily opposed to them. In many ways Paracelsus was building on top of the Renaissance project.

This is the perspective from which many of Paracelsus's posthumous followers viewed his work. They applauded his reforming stance, but also sought to bring him closer to the Renaissance than, perhaps, he might have liked. The story of early Paracelsianism is generally that of rapprochement to other Renaissance movements, even at the cost of some of his originality.

One of the major steps taken by early Paracelsians was the integration of Paracelsus in an ancient wisdom line. Most influentially, the Danish physician Petrus Severinus (1540–1602) described Paracelsus as the restorer of medical and alchemical knowledge (Shackelford 2004). Severinus's Paracelsus appeared engaged in a fundamentally humanist project of recovering forgotten wisdom. Severinus argued that medicine had been corrupted by medieval physicians and that Paracelsus was the only one who could reach out to its true roots – mostly those of Hippocrates (*c*. 460–*c*. 375 BCE).

This could make it sound as if Paracelsus single-handedly rediscovered ancient knowledge, but many followers, including Severinus, also believed in a kind of knowledge transmission handed down to Paracelsus. To support this belief, they latched onto an enigmatic passage in Paracelsus's treatise *The Great Surgery (Grosse Wundartzney*, 1536), where he maintained that in his youth he had been inducted into a "most hidden" form of knowledge called *adepta philosophia* ("adept philosophy") initially by his father, Wilhelm von Hohenheim, and later by several high-ranking clergymen (Paracelsus 1605, 101–02). One such individual was an unnamed "abbot of Spanheim"; this reference was taken by some followers to mean the Renaissance occult philosopher and Benedictine abbot of Sponheim Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516). That the chief transmitter of secret knowledge was Trithemius was openly embraced by the French Renaissance philosopher Jacques Gohory (1520–76), while others, like the

Flemish alchemist Gerard Dorn (*c.* 1530–84), may have operated on the assumption that Paracelsus was the abbot's pupil (Gohory 1568). Unfortunately, there is no direct evidence that Trithemius was whom Paracelsus meant by the abbot of Spanheim (Brann 1979).

What is certain is that this passage in *The Great Surgery* encouraged followers to believe Paracelsus was privy to a secret *prisca sapientia* that had been passed down to him. This wisdom was interpreted by most of his followers to be related to alchemy, even though Paracelsus used the term *adepta philosophia* (or variants such as *philosophia adepta* or *sophia adepta*) in many other ways as well.[4] Yet the view of his followers was, again, coloured by the same chapter in *The Great Surgery*. Prior to talking about his own acquisition of the *Adepta Philosophia* from his mentors, Paracelsus set this knowledge in a historical framework. First, he claimed that the ancient philosophers had considered long life as one of the greatest pursuits they could dedicate themselves to, and had enlisted alchemy as an important aid in this search. The cooperation of alchemy and philosophy yielded an all-powerful medicine Paracelsus called "Tincture" (*Tinctura*). Unfortunately, greedy "gold-makers" (*Aurifices*) seized the Tincture in order to pursue the transmutation of metals as the primary goal of alchemy. The true, medical goal of the Tincture took a back seat, but was still pursued by some of the ancients. Due to God's goodwill, powerful types of Tincture were then produced, whose recipes were still contained in precious old books. Unfortunately, these were suppressed by false physicians in order to advance their own useless brand of medicine. Paracelsus suggested that he had read these books, and argued that they should be rendered to the public so that their efficacy be once again known to everyone. Finally, Paracelsus observed that it was easy to take the wrong turn in alchemical research. If he had kept on the straight path, that was due to the guidance he received from his mentors in the *adepta philosophia*. In this sense he seemed to frame his own work as one of straightening out the errors that both alchemists and physicians had fallen into.

As this passage suggests, Paracelsus's relationship with alchemy was complex. He explicitly criticized the Catalan philosopher Ramon Lull (*c.* 1232–*c.* 1315), then (falsely) thought to have originated one of the most influential branches of medieval alchemy. (Pseudo-) Lullian alchemy was

particularly concerned with the production of the elixir, or the Philosophers' Stone (*lapis philosophorum*), a wondrous substance equally able to transmute metals into gold and to heal the human body (Pereira 1995). Paracelsus condemned the prioritization of making gold and silver over making medicine (Telle 1994, 169 n.20 is a good source for several quotes on this subject). In a rather damning passage, albeit originating from an early writing, he also rejected the pursuit of the Philosophers' Stone, which Paracelsus claimed neither to have made nor to have looked for (Paracelsus 1590, 48).

Such criticism aside, Paracelsus clearly valued the art of alchemy highly. He set alchemy as one of the pillars of his new medicine in his foundational work *Paragranum*, and left many authentic treatises concerned with medical-alchemical matters. To muddy the waters, several treatises on transmutational alchemy and the Philosophers' Stone were accredited to him posthumously. Today these are deemed spurious, but at the time Paracelsian followers accepted them as authentic (and some of the less scrupulous ones may have helped produce them). In the process of glorifying Paracelsus, they perpetuated the image of him as a master of the Philosophers' Stone (Telle 1994).

Although the reasons for this development are complex, there was some basis for it in the authentic work of Paracelsus. In particular, the passage in *The Great Surgery* gave alchemical enthusiasts some reason to believe that Paracelsus's reformation of alchemy was essentially about setting it along a medical path rather than rejecting its processes. Such Paracelsians understood the narrative as a vindication of at least some works of transmutational alchemy. One only had to put medicine instead of metallic transmutation as the chief goal to make the principles of medieval alchemy valid. Undoubtedly, many read the Philosophers' Stone as the Tincture Paracelsus was talking about.

Incidentally, this line of thought could lead to perverse results. As already mentioned, Lull himself had been condemned by Paracelsus, but most of the theory and practice of the *lapis philosophorum* was linked with the school of Lullian alchemy. As more and more Lullian works found their way into print, even some of the most zealous Paracelsian followers became

attracted to the medieval philosopher. Severinus – ever at the centre of efforts to link Paracelsus to *prisca sapientia* – ended up describing Lull as one of the followers of the "adept philosophy" (Severinus 1570/1, [4]). Oswald Croll (1563– 1608), another arch-Paracelsian, was also an ardent follower of Lull, and even dared to portray Lull and Paracelsus as equals in the frontispiece of his best-known work, *The Church of Alchemy* (*Basilica chymica*, 1609). Paracelsus would have been horrified to see this, but he could not deny that he had started it all.

Rather than embrace Lull wholeheartedly, others preferred to look elsewhere for the adept philosophers Paracelsus was referring to. Didn't, in fact, Paracelsus suggest that the true adepts were hidden, and their works not yet uncovered? Was not the "adept philosophy" a quiet, unassuming lineage of ancient wisdom, whose traces were yet to be found? Did not the true philosophers hide in the shadows, quietly pursuing their knowledge away from the public?

These kinds of consideration ultimately led to the development of an entire esoteric lore, that of the "adepts" or "Rosicrucians". At the time *Aureum vellus* was published (1598–1604), the fashion for secret adepts had not yet exploded onto the European scene. But it was soon to do so. In 1610, a minor publication by a German professor of medicine, Johann Wolfgang Dienheim (1587–1635), propelled the legend of the adepts Alexander Seton and Michael Sendivogius (1566–1636) into public consciousness. The Scottish alchemist Seton probably never existed, but the Polish nobleman Sendivogius certainly did, and a web of mystery developed around him (Prinke 2015, 1999). Even more importantly, in 1614 the Rosicrucian manifestos popularized the notion of a secret society of wise men who worked for the betterment of humanity. There was something distinctly Paracelsian in the Rosicrucian claims of knowing the secrets to long life, and in their condemnation of gold-making.

Quite apart from claims of contemporary alchemists, the Paracelsian "adept philosophy" also fostered a search for unknown alchemists, and even for anonymous treatises. This fitted quite well with the contemporary thirst for new knowledge, and helped publishing houses flourish. That Paracelsianism and the recovery of ancient and medieval alchemy went

hand in hand has been shown by Kahn (2007). Yet there was a dark side to this search as well: the creation of forgeries and forged identities.

As will be seen in the next section, the figure of Salomon Trismosin, the supposed mentor of Paracelsus and author of *Splendor solis*, was one such invented adept. It would be worth mentioning that Trismosin was by no means the most successfully forged adept. Much more influential was Basil Valentine, an imagined 14th-century Benedictine monk (Principe 2014, 143–158). Basil Valentine's *Twelve Keys* (*Zwölff Schlüssel*), a treatise on the making of the Philosophers' Stone, first appeared in a littleknown 1599 work called *A Short Summarizing Treatise* (*Ein Kurtz Summarische Tractat*), edited by Johann Thölde. The work was then reprinted in the third volume of *Aureum vellus*. Basil Valentine claimed to be a medieval monk; in reality, he was a contemporary alchemist, probably Johann Thölde himself. Valentine was enormously successful because he fitted the Paracelsian trope of the hidden adept, and also because his writings borrowed rather shamelessly Paracelsian ideas and practices. In particular, he offered straightforward descriptions of alchemical processes in an honest style that was drawn from Paracelsus's own, but still preserved the medieval alchemical mystique.

Salomon Trismosin, the invented preceptor of Paracelsus

When compared to the fake monk Basil Valentine, the forged figure of Salomon Trismosin proved to be much less successful. His descent into relative oblivion was the more striking as his "birth" was distinguished. The introductory volume of *Aureum vellus* did its very best to present Trismosin as a great adept philosopher. He was "the noble, all-bright, most excellent and valued philosopher" who was "the preceptor of the great philosopher and physician Theophrastus Paracelsus" (*Aureum vellus* 1598, frontispiece).[5]

We might suspect from this presentation that the creators of the Trismosin myth were not too fond of the suggestion that Trithemius was the original,

or greatest mentor of Paracelsus. Yet the supporters of Trithemius at least had a lead to base their assumptions on – Paracelsus's mention of the "abbot of Spanheim" in *The Great Surgery*. By comparison, Trismosin did not feature at all in *The Great Surgery's* long list of philosophers who had taught Paracelsus the *adepta philosophia.*

Aureum vellus does not bother to explain why Trismosin was absent from *The Great Surgery*. The reader had to take the cover's claim at face value. At least Trismosin's name sounded suitably impressive, the name (or rather the pseudonym) of a true adept. "Salomon", of course, recalls the name of the great Hebrew king, who was the supposed author of the gnomic biblical Psalms and Proverbs. He was also considered to be the founder of the great Temple in Jerusalem, an architectural feat that was much admired in the early modern period (Monod 2013). Solomon was sometimes accredited with a knowledge of alchemy, for instance in the medieval treatise *Aurora consurgens* or by the Paracelsian Heinrich Khunrath (1560–1605) (Kahn 2007, 575–93). Solomon's association with the "adept philosophy" can also be readily seen in an image belonging to Elias Ashmole's *Theatrum chemicum Britannicum* (1652), where an aged sage initiates a young disciple into alchemical secrets in a ritual act that takes place within the sacred space of Solomon's Temple.

The name "Trismosin" (or Trissmosin as initially spelled) was harder to decode, but strongly reminiscent of the mythical Hermes Trismegistus. As previously shown, Trismegistus was sometimes seen as the supreme founder of the lineage of *prisca sapientia*, and certainly of alchemy. Severinus clearly associated him with the "adept philosophy", an idea that had taken root around the time *Aureum vellus* was published. Of course, Trismosin did not claim to be Trismegistus, or an avatar thereof, but the name more or less subtly induced the idea that Trismosin's knowledge somehow resembled that of the mythical philosopher.

Still, the creators of the Trismosin myth must have realized that readers needed more than a name and a claim to be an adept philosopher. The "historical" Trismosin needed to be fleshed out to be believed in. As such, *Aureum vellus* begins with an autobiographical account of Trismosin's trials and tribulations, called "Treatise and Wanderings of the Very Famous

Gentleman Salomon Trismosin, with Three Marvellous Tinctures" ("Tractat unnd Wanderschafft deß hochberhümpten Herren Salomonis Trißmosini sampt dreyen gewaltigen Tincturen"). At this time, autobiographical accounts of alchemists were becoming a highly fashionable trope. Basil Valentine also talked about his experiences and searches. More famous in the period was the story of Bernard Trevisan, another made-up adept whose name was meant to be linked with the reallife medieval philosopher Bernard of Treviso (Kahn 2003).

Trismosin's autobiography begins with the revelation that his interest in alchemy was sparked when he met a miner named Flocker, who was something of an alchemist. The miner used a process involving lead, sulphur and silver, out of which he could extract a significant portion of gold. Flocker soon died in a mining accident, and the secret was lost with him. In 1473, Trismosin determined to travel in search of another artisan he could learn the art from. He spent a great deal of money for the next year and a half, learning some of the basic alchemical operations. Eventually, he arrived in Italy, becoming the apprentice of a Jewish alchemist who claimed to make silver out of tin. Trismosin accompanied this alchemist to Venice, but when Trismosin decided to have the silver tested by an assayer based in San Marco square, the assay failed. Fearing that he might be associated with a fraudster, Trismosin fled from the Jewish alchemist's employment. Eventually, he found a new job in the alchemical laboratory of a Venetian nobleman, whose chief alchemist was a German. Trismosin describes the laboratory as being set up in a large mansion just outside Venice, and being impressively equipped and staffed. The chief alchemist gave Trismosin a piece of cinnabar and a recipe to produce mercury and gold out of it, which the young artisan managed to do admirably. Both the chief alchemist and the Venetian nobleman were highly impressed by Trismosin's success, so they kept him in their laboratory under an oath of silence. Here he found out that many of the recipes they were testing originated in the East, having been purchased by the nobleman at great cost to himself. One of these manuscripts was called *Sarlamethon* and was written in Greek; the nobleman had it translated into Latin, and Trismosin used the recipe in it to produce a tincture that could transmute three types of metal into gold.

Soon after Trismosin managed this feat, the nobleman sailed out with the other seniors of Venice to the annual ceremony of “wedding of the sea” (*sposalizio del mare*), which is still carried out in a modified form today. During the ceremony a great storm arose, causing the sinking of the noblemen’s boats, including that of Trismosin’s employer, who was drowned. After his death, his family disbanded the laboratory and laid off the assistants, including Trismosin.

At this point, the narrative becomes terse. Trismosin left Venice to settle in “a still better place for my purpose” (*Aureum vellus* 1598, 4). Here he was entrusted with Kabbalistic and magical books written in the Egyptian language, which he gave for translation first into Greek, then into Latin. The fact that the translations were first done in Greek suggests that the place he settled was Constantinople; this supposition is strengthened by a legend I will come to. In working with these manuscripts, Trismosin learned the secrets of many tinctures prepared by heathen Egyptian kings with fanciful names such as Xophar, Xogar, Xopholat and Julaton. Trismosin marvelled at the fact that “the everlasting Godhead revealed such secrets to the pagans”, but admired them for having kept these very secret (*Aureum vellus* 1598, 4).

After understanding the principles of the Egyptian alchemical art, Trismosin began his work on the greatest of all tinctures. Called the “Red Lion”, this tincture had a beautiful red colour and was capable of infinite multiplication. One part of the tincture could transmute 1,500 parts of silver into the best gold. The tincture could also change tin, mercury, lead, copper and steel into pure gold. Unfortunately, he was not willing to share this recipe fully (though he gives partial recipes elsewhere), but he maintained that the tincture did not originate from gold. The autobiography ends with a rhymed philosophical exhortation to his disciples: “Study now what you are / So that you will see what is out there. / What you study, learn and are / That is precisely what you are. / Everything that is outside of us / Is also within / Amen” (*Aureum vellus* 1598, 5).[6]

What is striking about Trismosin’s autobiography is its careful detail and its geographical spread. The accounts of most previous alchemists were rather vague, with a focus on tropes rather than on exact testimony. Common

themes such as long travels, the meeting of alchemical charlatans and the quest for the true path are also present here. However, there is also a level of historical accuracy that is unusual, including dates, descriptions of local practices and laboratory set-ups. In particular, there is an overwhelming focus on Venice in the account, suggesting the contemporary German fascination with this nearby and yet exotic land. Venice is described, rather accurately, as the 15th-century gateway to the East, a place enriched by trade contacts with the Greeks, Turks and other peoples of the Orient. Yet Trismosin's emphasis is not on Venice as a commercial empire, but as a humanist centre where Eastern manuscripts were received, translated and researched. Trismosin is not a scholar, and never claims to know Eastern languages (not even Greek), but he cleverly positions himself at the receiving end of a flow of knowledge coming from these remote lands. When the Venetian job dries up, not only does he not go back to Germany, but he moves even closer to the source of knowledge, probably to Constantinople.

The account conveys a profound certainty that the greatest knowledge was to be found in the East. This was, as we saw, a common claim among Renaissance philosophers and alchemists, who looked beyond Greece and Rome for the birthplace of philosophy. While Trismosin accepts Greece's role as facilitating access to true knowledge, the real source is to be found in Egypt, the land of the mythical Trismegistus and of Hermetic philosophy. Trismosin's account fosters the lore of Egypt as a place of secret revelations, where ancient king-pharaohs pursued the study of nature to attain knowledge of the greatest treasures affordable on earth, the tinctures. Implicitly, Trismosin equates the *prisca sapientia* with the achievement of alchemical tinctures, and, as such, mirrors Paracelsus's views of the "adept philosophy".

However, what Trismosin's autobiography fails to do is associate this philosopher with Paracelsus. We know from the frontispiece that he was the preceptor of the Swiss physician, and we are told in the account that Trismosin had a number of disciples. Yet those seeking an understanding of the lineage of the "adept philosophy" to Paracelsus would be disappointed. Even worse, beyond the title, there is no mention of Paracelsus in the first volume at all. It was only later that a legend gave credence to the idea that

the Swiss physician met the German alchemist in Constantinople and was told the secret of the Philosophers' Stone there (Telle 2006/7, 156– 7). There are also spurious documents related to Trismosin and Paracelsus in various European archives. A letter from Trismosin to Paracelsus in the University Library of Leiden (Codex Vossianus Q 24), a Trismosin manuscript on the Philosophers' Stone in Halle (Halle MS 1612), and a manuscript of secrets shared by Trismosin with Paracelsus in the Royal Library of Copenhagen (GKS MS 1722) betray the determination of some Paracelsians to strengthen the flimsy connection between the two.

The secret knowledge of the adepts?

Beyond accrediting Trismosin as an adept, his account serves as an introduction to the first volume of *Aureum vellus*. This purports to bring to light the secret manuscripts of the Egyptian kings, which Trismosin had supposedly perused. In reality, there are much fewer descriptions of Egyptian tinctures than we might have expected: only three treatises actually mention Egypt.

As we continue reading through *Aureum vellus*, the great promise of the frontispiece and of the Trismosin autobiography soon peters out. After we are given two recipes for tinctures that purport to originate from Trismosin, we finally come to the first proper "Egyptian" recipe, "the tincture of King Julaton". Yet right after this, we are thrown into complete confusion, because the next treatise has nothing to do with Trismosin, but is authored by a certain Hieronymus Crinot. Who is this person never mentioned or introduced before? The only attempt at explaining the presence of this individual in relation to Trismosin comes in the next treatise, "The Universal Tincture of Sir Hieronymus Crinot", which was supposedly extracted from a secret alphabet found in the Egyptian books that were uncovered by Trismosin. Are we to understand that Crinot was a disciple of Trismosin? In fact, as we read on, it becomes clear that Crinot was supposed to have lived earlier than Trismosin, and that they did not know each other directly. The text contains the testimony of Georg Biltdorff, abbot of Saint Morin, who claims that Crinot was a German alchemist who lived for many years in Egypt, possessed the Philosophers' Stone, and was

a pious gentleman who built no fewer than 1,300 churches upon his return to Europe. He wrote many books and collected many manuscripts that were spread about after his death (*Aureum vellus* 1598, 26). In fact, the treatise on the tincture of the "Great Egyptian King Xophar" claims to have been written down by Crinot and prefaced *post factum* by Trismosin.

As we move deeper into the book, the mysterious Crinot vanishes. We then encounter several treatises bearing strange names like *Nefolon, Cangeniveron* or *Moratosan*. These are thankfully identified as originating from Trismosin. Yet they seem to have nothing to do with Egyptian kings, except for "Book Suforethon", which promises to teach the secret of long life, whereby the Egyptian king Xopholat prolonged his life for 300 years (*Aureum vellus* 1598, 47). The rest of the book does not appear to reflect the wisdom of Egypt; instead, the recipes contain rather common European ingredients, like Roman vitriol or Hungarian gold.

By the end of the volume, we have to conclude that the promise of ground-breaking knowledge from Egypt and the East has been greatly exaggerated. Just as there is nothing about Paracelsus in this volume, so is there very little of the "remains and monuments of the Egyptian, Arab, Chaldean and Assyrian kings and wise men" promised on the frontispiece. Instead, the volume comes across as a compendium of recipes from unknown German alchemists. These probably originated in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and did not come from some great Eastern source, but from common European, even German, alchemical practice.

Thus, the great scheme setting up Paracelsus as the recipient of secret knowledge acquired by his preceptor Trismosin unravels. So does the attempt to present the recipes as the product of a *prisca sapientia* from Egypt or the East. What we are left with is a series of recipes no different from other medieval recipes that survive in manuscripts spread throughout Europe. This, in fact, suggests the possibility that Trismosin may have been the pseudonym of a real medieval or early Renaissance alchemist, not a complete figment of Paracelsian imagination. If so, he was certainly not related to Paracelsus nor did he receive some great form of Eastern knowledge. Incidentally, this likelihood may provide the answer to why Trismosin failed where Basil Valentine succeeded: Trismosin's recipes were

too similar to medieval ones to perpetuate his reputation. Moreover, Trismosin did not ultimately offer any philosophical doctrines that would have appealed to a Paracelsian, like Basil Valentine did.

Was the editor, Leonhard Straub, the perpetrator of this grand deception, or was it someone else? Even though we do not have the original manuscript, we can surmise that the editor can at least partially be exonerated, since he clearly appropriated a body of recipes already assigned to Trismosin. I have had the opportunity to consult the manuscript entitled *Ars magna et sacra* in the archive of the Royal Library of Copenhagen (GKS MS 249). Like the published volume, it is written entirely in German; however, there is a cover in Latin, which has been handwritten by a different person and may be a later addition. We have only to glimpse at it to see that it makes even starker claims than the *Aureum vellus* frontispiece. The manuscript contains the "Great and Sacred Art" originating "out of the most antique, oldest and most primitive wisdom of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Persians, Assyrians, Hebrews, of their original remains and monuments". We are told that the knowledge residing in the manuscript was the original *prisca sapientia* of the Egyptians and of the Hebrews as codified by Hermes Trismegistus and spread into Greece by Ostanes, Zamolxis and Democritus, and into Islam by Geber and others, before finally making its way into Latin Europe through the efforts of Trismosin and Theophrastus, that is, Paracelsus.

This cover page appears to confirm that *Aureum vellus's* claims were not invented by Straub. If anything, Straub toned down some of the spectacular lineage of wisdom envisaged in the manuscript. Of course, at this stage we cannot exclude the possibility that this triumphant cover was added after *Aureum vellus* was published – more research needs to be done on the palaeography and provenance of this manuscript. Yet what is clear is that this manuscript is not the one that the editor used, as the structure is not the same, and some recipes do not correspond. This suggests that at least the bulk of the manuscript, if not necessarily its cover, was compiled independently of the publication. Ironically, this manuscript also contains a reference to Paracelsus as disciple of Trismosin that never made its way into *Aureum vellus*. In the "Book of Trismosin", the German alchemist writes that he has nine disciples, of whom "Philipp Hohenheims" is the best

one. This brief mention would have been a goldmine for the editor, but it is clear that the manuscript he used did not include this Trismosin book.

From Trismosin to *Splendor solis*

Having published the first and defining volume of *Aureum vellus*, Straub proceeded to publish two more volumes. The intention was to further ground Paracelsus in a larger alchemical tradition that included other philosophers like Bartholomaeus Korndorffer, Trithemius, Ulrich Poyssel and, as an afterthought, Basil Valentine.[7] Perhaps it was not a coincidence that the third volume ended with the foundational *Emerald Tablet* of Hermes Trismegistus, the "father of philosophers". The later Basel editors added other lesser-known alchemists like Caspar Hartung von Hoff, Johannes of Padua and Everarius to the list.

However, it was an anonymous treatise that made the greatest impact on contemporaries and later generations: *Splendor solis*. This illustrated work on the Philosophers' Stone impressed certain French readers so much that they published it under the overall title of *The Golden Fleece* (*La Toyson d'or,* 1612), as if the other parts of *Aureum vellus* had never existed. The editor of the French version of *Splendor solis* was sufficiently invested in the legend of Trismosin and Paracelsus to associate this work directly with Trismosin. Thus, he claimed that *Splendor solis* had essentially been composed by "that Great Philosopher Salomon Trismosin, Preceptor of Paracelsus" from "the weightiest monuments of antiquity, not only of the Chaldeans, Hebrews, Arabs, Greeks, but also of Latins, and of other approved authors" (*La Toyson d'or* 1612, frontispiece). Thus the claim made on the cover of the first volume of *Aureum vellus* was lifted, changed and transferred to *Splendor solis*. This alteration of the original text accredited Salomon Trismosin with the work, a claim that was never made in the German *Aureum vellus*.[8]

Of course, Straub himself had encouraged an indirect connection between the anonymous treatise and Trismosin. This, again, may not have been his intention: it may well have been the case that the unknown Trismosin manuscript Straub used included *Splendor solis*. Indeed, if the manuscript

of the *Ars magna* is any indication, the editor's manuscript could have contained accretions of treatises that were in some sense, but not directly, associated with Trismosin.[9] Moreover, the strange and unexplained presence of Hieronymus Crinot and Abbot Georg Biltdorff in the central part of the first *Aureum vellus* volume suggests that the "Trismosin" label was wide and flexible enough to include works by other authors. It is perhaps a wiser scholarly move to refer to such treatises as belonging to a loose "Trismosinian" sphere rather than being directly associated with Trismosin.

But how to characterize such a Trismosinian sphere, since we can see by the five volumes of *Aureum vellus* that it could include almost any alchemical treatise? It seems to me that such a sphere encompassed works that would in some sense fit the overall theme followed in this article: the thesis of a lineage of *prisca sapientia* originating primarily in Egypt, which reached Paracelsus mainly via the teachings and manuscripts of Trismosin, but perhaps through others as well, such as Trithemius and Korndorffer. In its more flexible form, the lineage could embrace medieval alchemists that were in their own way linked to this *prisca sapientia* line.

If we apply this principle, we must consider how *Splendor solis* fitted within the Trismosinian sphere, and what role it played in the Paracelsian lore. The text of *Splendor solis* fits rather squarely within the medieval tradition of the *florilegium* (collection of wise sayings), with most of the citations associated with well-known alchemists (Telle 2006, 425–27).

What is certain is that the work was quite popular with most early Paracelsians, as Joachim Telle has pointed out (Telle 2006, 432–3). Telle considered that their interest in *Splendor solis* was part of an attempt to transform Paracelsus into a German Hermes Trismegistus, a process of mystification that turned the Swiss physician into a gold-maker and transmutational alchemist (Telle 2006, 432; also Telle 2006/7, 159–69). My view is that Telle's judgement of most early Paracelsians is too harsh. Of course, those Paracelsians who conspired to forge fake treatises and adepts were involved in mystification. Many, however, could have genuinely believed in Paracelsus's identity as an alchemist. As I have shown in my previous sections, Paracelsus himself attempted to appropriate

transmutational alchemy within his “adept philosophy”, by putting it under the domain of medical alchemy and by rejecting goldmaking as a “false path”. His hints at a lineage of true alchemical knowledge could only encourage early Paracelsians’ efforts to place Paracelsus within a *prisca sapientia* line. If these intentions ended up backfiring in some cases, contributing to the legend of “Paracelsus the gold-maker”, it was probably out of too much enthusiasm and, perhaps, too much interest in alchemy and alchemical treatises. Yet, as the autobiography of Salomon Trismosin suggests, who could have resisted the promise of secret knowledge?

In any case, *Splendor solis* fitted better than other texts within the overarching medical alchemical framework of Paracelsianism. In line with Paracelsus’s belief that the medical goal should supersede all others, *Splendor solis* maintains that the primary virtue of the Philosophers’ Stone is its ability to cure human bodies (*Aureum vellus* III, 1599, 81). There are three other benefits: the improvement of metals, the transmutation of ordinary stones into precious gems, and the softening of glass. These claims seem to be lifted directly from the last chapter of *Aurora consurgens*, which, as Rafał Prinke points out in this volume, is one of the chief sources of *Splendor solis* (*Aurora consurgens* 1593, 241).

Splendor solis further describes in detail the medical benefits of the Philosophers’ Stone:

… the wise Philosophers say that if taken in a warm draught of wine or water, it will immediately cure paralysis, dropsy, leprosy, jaundice, palpitation, colic, fever, palsy, and many other diseases within and without the body, when used as a salve. It strengthens an unhealthy stomach, takes away rheumatism and cures melancholy; it relieves eye diseases, and invigorates the heart; it brings back hearing, makes the teeth sound, restores lame limbs, heals all apostemes, as well as other injuries, fistulas, cancers and ulcers, when taken or used as salve or powder. Senior says that it makes human beings joyous and young, makes the body fresh and healthy, rejuvenates inside and outside, for it is a medicine above all the medicines of Hippocrates, Galen, Constantine, Alexander and Avicenna, and of other learned physicians (*Aureum vellus* III, 1599, 82).

In other words, the Philosophers' Stone is the Universal Medicine that not only cures most – if not all – diseases but also restores youth and prolongs life. It is interesting to note that this list of medical benefits, itself drawn on the claims of *Aurora consurgens*, puts in first place several diseases that were then considered incurable by traditional medicine. Such diseases were believed to be so deeply entrenched in the body that no medicine could eliminate them. Yet it became a chief assertion of medical alchemy that its chemical compounds could actually penetrate the body so profoundly that they could remove these illnesses. Indeed, one of the strongest claims made on behalf of Paracelsus, and recorded on his Salzburg tombstone, was that he managed to heal leprosy, gout and dropsy.

Furthermore, the mildly polemic attitude of *Splendor solis* could only have delighted the early Paracelsians, who were often engaged in rhetorical battles with the traditional medical establishment (Debus 2002, 127–204). The claim that the alchemical medicine was above those of "Hippocrates, Galen, Constantine, Alexander, and Avicenna" originated from *Aurora consurgens* (1593, 423), but here it is associated with the alchemist Senior – by his real name Muhammad ibn Umail al-Tamîmî (*c.* 900–60), also called Senior Zadith. Incidentally, the historical Senior could have criticized neither Avicenna, since the latter was born shortly after the alchemist died (980), nor Constantine (most likely the physician Constantinus Africanus, who lived in the 11th century). Yet the association was appropriate, as Senior was the ultimate source of *Aurora consurgens*.[10]

This "medical" section of *Splendor solis* shows why early Paracelsians might have been persuaded to add it to their ever-growing list of writings of "adept philosophy". There were other reasons for it as well. One was the fact that the Philosophers' Stone was often called here "Tincture", in line with Paracelsus's preference for this term in *The Great Surgery*. Another, perhaps even more important, was the treatise's prefiguration of Paracelsus's muchdebated doctrine of the three principles (*tria prima*). According to Paracelsus, all matter was made up of mercury (fluid), sulphur (volatile substance) and salt (earthy solid substance). Alchemy was the only method that could be used to separate a body into these three primordial principles.

Many Paracelsians took this notion of the *tria prima* as the defining feature of their movement, even if it was arguably not as central to Paracelsus's writings as some made it out to be. The debate on this alchemical composition of bodies became particularly heated in the 17th century. It was eventually discounted by the influential alchemist and physician Jan Baptist van Helmont (1579–1644) and by the chemical enthusiast Robert Boyle (Hedesan 2016).

As some scholars have noted, the idea of three principles of matter was prefigured by certain alchemical treatises of the Late Middle Ages, chiefly the *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit* ("Book of the Holy Trinity") (Hooykaas 1937). *Splendor solis* also seemed to reflect a ternary structure in the composition of metals. Thus, it claimed that the "water", "moisture", or "quintessence" within metallic bodies was called mercury or the "soul"; the sulphurous part was its spirit; and the solid body was its earth (*Aureum vellus* III, 1599, 80). It was easy to read this passage as referring to mercury (soul), sulphur (spirit) and salt (body, or earth). Moreover, these three united to create one thing, just as for Paracelsians the three principles came together into the composition of matter.

Conclusions

As this paper has shown, the publication of *Splendor solis* in 1599 was the result of complex historical factors surrounding the reform movement of Paracelsianism. Despite Paracelsus's rhetorical claims of originality and rejection of authority, most of his early followers believed that the Swiss physician was a quintessential Renaissance figure, engaged in the recovery of true ancient knowledge. They did not see Paracelsus's call for the reformation of medicine and alchemy as incompatible with that of a restoration of the *prisca sapientia*. In fact, they believed that Paracelsus had been privy to the original teachings of the ancients, as inherited through his teachers of the *adepta philosophia*. This belief was borne out of their reading of a chapter in Paracelsus's *The Great Surgery* that seemed to warrant this view, which Paracelsian followers preferred even at the cost of ignoring some passages that were inconvenient to their interpretation.

At the extreme end of this belief stood some Paracelsians who did not mind inventing an adept philosopher such as Salomon Trismosin, possibly based on an actual alchemist living in the Late Middle Ages or early Renaissance. Trismosin was portrayed as a legendary figure who acquired the alchemical secrets of ancient Egypt and then shared them with his disciple Paracelsus. Once his character was established, he could be used to appropriate medieval alchemical treatises under a loose "Trismosinian" sphere. One work that benefitted from this conjecture was the anonymous *Splendor solis*, found in several manuscripts throughout Europe. It was thought fit by Leonhard Straub to be included within his Trismosinian volumes entitled *Aureum vellus.* Yet what started as a vague association between *Splendor solis* and Trismosin eventually grew into a false attribution when a French editor decided to present Trismosin as the author of *Splendor solis*. Clearly, he saw the advantages of strengthening the medieval treatise's ties to Paracelsianism.

We can safely conclude that the Paracelsian movement was not only the impetus behind the publication of the work, but also one of the chief reasons *Splendor solis* became a popular treatise among the alchemically minded thinkers and practitioners of early modern Europe. After *Aureum vellus*, it was published within several other alchemical collections. It even had an English translation, which remained in manuscript (Telle 2006, 439–442).

As Paracelsianism faded at the end of the 17th century, *Splendor solis* lost some of its lustre as well. In 1744, scholar Nicolas Lenglet du Fresnoy (1674–1755) claimed that it had a mixed reputation, being "held in esteem by some, deprecated by others" (Lenglet du Fresnoy 1742, I, 474). The work was essentially forgotten for most of the 19th century, only to be revived at the turn of the 20th century in the circle of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. By the time Julius Kohn published his 1920 version of *Splendor solis,* the work had shed much of its Paracelsian meaning. Still, Kohn knew enough of Paracelsian doctrine to mention in his introduction that the composition of matter out of the *tria prima* was a renewed possibility in the demise of Lavoisier's principle of the immutability of elements. He was of course referring to the findings of radioactivity (J. K. 1920, 7). Moreover, his renewed association of *Splendor solis* with

Salomon Trismosin, “the adept and teacher of Paracelsus”, helped rescue the hero of *Aureum vellus* from oblivion.

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La Toyson d'or ou La Fleur des Thresors, en laquelle est succintement & methodiquement traicté de la Pierre des Philosophes, de son excellence, effects & vertu admirable. Plus, de son Origine, & du vray moyen de pouvouir parvenir à la perfection. Enrichies de Figures, et des propres Couleurs representees au vif, selon qu'elles doivent necessairement arriver en la pratique de ce bel Œuvre. Et Recueillies des plus graves monuments de l'Antiquité, tant Chaldeens, Hebreux, Aegyptiens, Arabes, Grecs, que Latins, & autres Autheurs approuvez, par ce Grand Philosophe Salomon Trismosin Precepteur de Paracelse. Traduict d'Alemand en Francois, & commenté en forme de Paraphrase sur chaque Chapitre par L.I. 1612. Paris: Charles Sevestre.

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[1] These last two volumes seem to be an attempt by Basel printers to capitalize on the success of the three Rorschach volumes, which they also reprinted. As Rafał Prinke points out in his article in this volume, the *Aureum vellus* generated immediate reprints and pirated versions.

[2] A good introduction to the topic of Hermes Trismegistus and Hermetic philosophy is provided by Faivre (1995).

[3] On *prisca sapientia* and variants, see Schmidt-Biggemann (2004), Walker (1972), Schmitt (1970).

[4] I am currently preparing a paper on the topic, called “The Rise of the Concept of the ‘Adept’ in Early Modern Alchemy: From Paracelsus to Oswald Croll”.

[5] “… von dem Edlen / Hocherleuchten / Fürtreffenlichen / bewerten Philosopho Salomone Trißmosino (so deß grossen Philosophi und Medici Theophrasti Paracelsi Praeceptor gewesen)”

[6] “Studier nun darauß du bist / So wirst du sehen was da ist. / Was du studierst, lehrnest und ist / Das ist eben darauß du bist. / Alles was ausser unser ist / Ist auch in uns. Amen.”

[7] Korndorffer was supposed to have had some kind of relationship with Paracelsus as well, yet later followers of Paracelsus could not agree whether he was one of the preceptors of Paracelsus or rather his disciple (Telle 1994, 157).

[8] Telle (2006, 441) has already shown that this was the first time Trismosin was assigned authorship of *Splendor solis*, so Julius Kohn cannot be credited with this claim.

[9] For example, the *Ars magna* contains recipes originating from Bartholomaeus Korndorffer and Paracelsus, as well as an illustrated “vision” that is clearly of medieval origin; see 209r–11r. Korndorffer and Paracelsus figured in the second volume of *Aureum vellus.*

[10] I would like to thank Rafał Prinke for pointing me to the *Aurora consurgens* background to this section of *Splendor Solis*.

Commentary on the Text and Plates of Splendor Solis

Stephen Skinner

The following pages offer a structural overview of the colour plates and the text in the British Library manuscript of *Splendor solis* (Harley 3469). Each of the 22 colour plates is accompanied by a description of the main illustration and the frame imagery, as well as a summary of the original text, together with some analysis of the symbolic meaning of the imagery. This information should help the reader when navigating the manuscript, as well as offering an overall interpretation of the manuscript in terms of the process of practical alchemy.

Summary of the plates

The original text of *Splendor solis* cannot be considered a full commentary on the illustrations. There are many symbols found in these that are not even mentioned in the text. Likewise the plates only occasionally illustrate points in the text. This suggests that they were not generated at the same time.

The 22 plates are composed of four sets, which provide four separate descriptions of the stages of the Great Work (the process of creating the Philosophers' Stone). The first set contains four plates; the second set, seven plates; the third set, seven plates; and the final set, four plates, giving a total of 22. This grouping is based on the number of Elements (four) and of planets (seven). The sets are as follows:

1. THE SUMMARY OF THE PRINCIPLES OF THE WORK

- Plate 1: The Work is to take the dull sun (gold hidden in the seams of the earth) and make it the bright sun of the alchemists' gold.
- Plate 2: The Philosopher (alchemist) does this within his one flask set against a natural landscape.
- Plate 3: The basis of the Work is the conjunction of the Philosopher's Mercury and Sulphur. [1]
- Plate 4: The Queen and the King represent the sun and the moon, or Sulphur and Mercury, the "chemical wedding".

2. THE TRANSMUTATIONAL OPERATIONAL SEQUENCE

- Plate 5: The prima materia, like ore, must come from nature.
- Plate 6: Crows symbolize the first stage, the nigredo or blackening, beginning to turn white.
- Plate 7: Dissolution, the drowning of the King, is the next stage – usually symbolized by the swan.
- Plate 8: Arising out of the swamp of black nigredo, the figure is offered a new raiment.
- Plate 9: The hermaphrodite symbolizes conjunction of the male and female.
- Plate 10: The four limbs (the four Elements) are separated from the golden head of the quintessence.
- Plate 11: Boiling, with vapours rising like the white bird, rejuvenates the matter.

3. THE SEQUENCE ARRANGED BY SEVEN PLANETARY HERMETIC FLASKS

- Symbolized by the seven planets: Saturn (lead), Jupiter (tin), Mars (iron), Sun (gold), Venus (copper), Mercury (quicksilver), Luna (silver).

4. THE SEQUENCE AS EXPRESSED IN FOUR STAGES

- Plates 19 and 22: The evolution from the gold of the sun hidden behind or in the earth to the pure gold sun shining brightly at dawn.

- Plates 20 and 21: Alchemy is as easy as cooking and washing (referred to as “women’s work”) and child’s play.

Throughout the text the matter being worked on, which is initially the *prima materia*, is described as “earth”. It is of course not literally earth, but this term simply follows on from the description of the action of nature on the earth to produce hills and mountains and the ore within them. The idea is that the alchemist must start with something “half done” by nature and then carry it to perfection – gold being considered the greatest perfection among the metals. Later, in the fourth treatise, the matter is referred to as the (Philosophers’) Stone rather than “earth”.

Originally the plates were untitled, but in this edition they have been given descriptive titles for convenience. Folio numbers are shown in square brackets as in the original manuscript and also in the translation by Joscelyn Godwin. Note that “r” stands for “*recto*”, the front of the leaf, and “v” for “*verso*”, the back of the leaf.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLATES WITH A SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

1: The Summary of the Principles of the Work

[f.1r] This text consists of a preface followed by seven treatises.

[f.2r] PLATE 1: THE ARMS OF THE ART

A coat of arms consisting of a sun with blue ornate heraldic foliage, surmounted by a crowned helmet with three crescent moons. Above the shield another sun shines down from a red hanging. *Scroll text: Arma Artis*, “Arms of the Art”.[2]
Frame images: Two monkeys (one with a lute), herons, owl, plants.
Meaning: This art transforms tarnished natural gold/sun to bright alchemist’s sun/gold (an idea represented by the two suns). The three suns

in the mouth and eyes of the lower sun represent the alchemical axiom “three in one and one in three”.

[f.2v] THE PREFACE

The preface points out that it is better not to begin the art of alchemy at all than to practise it casually.

[f.3r] This part observes the processes of nature and their relationship to the Great Work. All metals derive from the earth, modified by the action of the seven planets interacting with the four Elements over time. By means of natural agitation and combination, every growing thing (including metals) will be brought forth by nature. We cannot make a tree, but if we find the seed, plant it in the right soil and nurture it, we can grow one. In the same way, we can “grow” gold from the right “seed” or starting point, if the Work is carried out in a manner that allows nature to bring it to perfection. A reference to Aristotle’s *Meteorology* brings to mind his theory that all nature aims for perfection within each class of substance, such as metals. Everything owes its existence to the *prima materia*, which, when provided with the correct form, comes into full manifestation.

Plate 1: The Arms of the Art

The four Elements contribute to the Work in various proportions, hence the emphasis in the text on their qualities – moisture, dryness, cold and heat. As the scroll in Plate 2 proclaims: “Let us investigate the four Elements of nature.” The alchemists believed that if they could bring the *prima materia* to perfection through the correct sequence of actions by the Elements, it would become gold. The presence of gold in the mines made it seem that the process of transmutation was possible, as nature had apparently already partly completed it. The alchemists, however, thought that they could speed up nature’s work and arrive at gold many aeons before nature.

One of the great questions in alchemy is “What is the *prima materia*?” As a starting point the *prima materia* (called Philosophers’ Mercury) is said to be common to all metals and assembled from the four Elements. Metals used

in the process usually appear as compounds rather than chemical elements, manifesting as powder, earth, slime or vapour. For example, the first process turns the metal into a black slime (*nigredo*). The ingredients are often said to be salt, sulphur and mercury, but none of these apply to the ordinary chemical.

[f.4r] PLATE 2: THE PHILSOPHER AND HIS FLASK

A bearded Philosopher stands wearing red and blue, pointing to a flask half full of golden liquid, the finished elixir.
Scroll text: Eamus Quesitum Quasuor Elemementorum Naturas [sic], which roughly translates as "Let us investigate the four Elements of nature."[3]
Frame images: Deer (male and female), peacock, owl, birds, fly. *Meaning:* The Philosopher, holding in his hand the elixir, encourages us to first investigate the four Elements in the context of nature.

[f.4v] THE FIRST TREATISE

The key to applying the processes correctly is the right sequence of colour changes. The Stone is achieved via the "greening" of nature.[4] Natural "greening" ripens things at the proper time, but one must assist nature by using the art of alchemy to speed up the process.

Plate 2: The Philosopher and His Flask

There is no agreement about how long this process may take, with time spans variously given as seven days, ten days, forty days, a year, the four seasons and three years. The hen's egg allegory underlines that, just as an egg will not hatch without incubation, so external heat must be gently applied for transmutation to occur.

[f.6r] First the *prima materia* must decay. Putrefaction can be achieved by applying external heat (or excessive cold, in which case it is called mortification). Here moisture binds the dry material. [f.6v] The dry part is first separated and turned to ashes, not by incineration but by gradual

soaking, trituration and calcination occurring so that moist and dry parts are combined.

[f.7r] PLATE 3: THE KNIGHT OF THE DOUBLE FOUNTAIN

A crowned knight stands astride an ornate double fountain, which overflows. His buckler is coloured in sequence black, white, yellow and red (the sequence laid out by Heraclitus) and seven stars (planets) encircle his head. In full gold-trimmed armour, he brandishes a sword in his right hand and holds a golden shield in his left, on which is inscribed: "*Ex duabus aqui una[m] facite Qui quaeritis Sole et Luna facere. Et date bibere in mico uro. Et uidebitis cum mortuum. Dein de aqua terra facite Et lapide multiplicastis."* This roughly translates as: "Out of two waters make one, you, who seek to do [use] the Sun and the Moon. Give it the sparkling burning [liquid] to drink.[5] And you will see that it is dead. Then, out of the water, the earth is made. And the stone is multiplied."
Frame images: Peacock, birds, owl, flowers.
Meaning: The colours on the knight's breastplate echo the colours of the sequence of operations: black, white, citrine (yellow), red. The double fountain contains Philosophical Mercury and Philosophical Sulphur conjoined, and the seven stars (planets) circle his head. The sword may symbolize the Secret Fire of Pontanus.[6]

[f.7v] THE SECOND TREATISE

Nature makes metals out of Mercury and Sulphur. Their combined vapour condenses naturally as metal veins in the earth. The Philosophers' Quicksilver is the very first substance of metals.

Plate 3: The Knight of the Double Fountain

Nature combines Philosophers' Quicksilver and Sulphur. Alchemists should use this combined substance, which has a metallic nature, and [f.8v] begin where nature has left off, using this combined form to begin their art. [f.9r] The work begins by dissolving the "earth" (*prima materia*), subliming,

distilling and coagulating it; making it rise and fall; soaking it and then drying it out. These manipulations must all be completed together, at one time and in a single vessel.

[f.10r] PLATE 4: THE LUNAR QUEEN AND THE SOLAR KING

The Queen (with a scroll inscribed *Lac Viramium*, "Virgin's Milk") in white stands on a living ball of this liquid, with the Moon above her. She talks to the King who also has a scroll (*Coagula Maasenculium* [sic],[7] "Masculine Coagulation"), holds a sceptre and wears red and ermine robes. He stands under a Sun, with his feet in a fire.[8]

Frame images: Plants and birds. The top scroll reads *Particularia* and the bottom one *Via Universalis particularibus. Inclusis*, meaning "the particular is derived from (and included in) the universal way."

Below is a frieze showing: on the left, Achilles battling Hector; in the centre, scenes of Alexander the Great's[9] army with the caption "capturing the Basilisk,"[10]; and, on the right, the King visiting Diogenes,[11] the Philosopher in a barrel.

Meaning: The Great Work is about the conjunction of the Philosophers' Sulphur and Mercury. These figures also represent Diana-Moon (the White Stone) and Apollo-Sun (the Red Stone). The specific examples are true, or included in, universal principles. If the "virgin's milk" is taken to be a solvent, then this plate exemplifies the alchemical formula *solve et coagula*, "dissolve and coagulate". This conjunction of the White Queen (Mercury) and the Red King (Sulphur) is often described as "the chemical wedding".[12]

Plate 4: The Lunar Queen and the Solar King

2: The Transmutational Operational Sequence

[f.11r] THE THIRD TREATISE

This treatise contains seven parables, which successively explain the process of transmutation. These are illustrated in Plates 5–11.

The first parable

This describes the operation in nature, laying out the alchemist's view of geology and ore formation, which is not very different from the views of modern geologists. God has created hills, valleys, rocks and ores through the influence of the planets and the operation of nature. [f.11v] This natural process began when the earth was heaped up and subjected to the sun's heat. The steamy warmth led to sulphurous vapours being violently expelled from the previously cold, moist earth, causing the uplift and formation of hills and mountains. [f.12r] This is why the best ores are found in mountainous regions, where the earth has been well mixed and "cooked". Ore is not found where the earth is flat, because the soil is slimy, loamy and fat (heavy with clay) – lowlands being formed of silt not stone. Here the soil has drunk too much water, been softened and then reset like dough (i.e. dried up). [f.12v] No soil can become stone unless it is rich, slimy and well moistened.[13] By the sun's heat and nature it may then become stone. The watery version may produce the Philosophers' Mercury, but that which is fiery and hardened [f.13r] produces the Philosophers' Sulphur.

[f.13v] PLATE 5: MINING THE ORE

Two miners dig into a small hill at two points with pickaxes. In a lake nearby floats a crescent moon facing upward.

Frame images: This framing is different, resembling a gilt mirror. Below, King Hasueros (Ahasuerus) and Queen Esthes (Esther) are at court, a reference to the story in the Old Testament book of Ruth in which Ruth saves the Jewish people from Ahasuerus's pogrom.[14] *Meaning:* The *prima materia* must be drawn from nature, possibly from a combination of *two* mined ores.

Plate 5: Mining the Ore

[f.14r] *The second parable*

The moisture in the air, which is between heaven and earth, is the life of everything. It forms rain and waters the earth, which then blooms and yields fruit. In the midst of this grows a tree, with crows – some black, some white – perching upon it, which represents the *nigredo* turning white. The crows fly away at daybreak, the dawning of the next stage. This tree is said to bring forth four things: [f.14v] pearls, *terra foliata* (bird's nests) and gold. Also, healing fruit.[15]

[f.15r] PLATE 6: THE ALCHEMICAL TREE WITH GOLDEN BOUGHS

Aeneas and Silvius talk under a tree which has seven black and seven white crows flying from it. The largest crow pecks at the fruit of the tree, and his head turns white. A man is climbing a ladder propped against the tree, which grows through a golden crown (indicating a royal art). He is plucking a golden bough, which will enable Aeneas to pass through hellfire unscathed.[16] The figures are dressed in red and white.

Frame images: Four naked woman bathe at a golden fountain attended by two attendants. There is a roundel in the centre showing the date 1582.[17]
Meaning: The crows representing the *nigredo* are dispersed. Half have turned white, indicating the next stage. The two figures wear the colours of the next two stages of the transmutation, white and red. The female attendants wear red and citrine. The colour citrine represents a short phase called *citrinatis* that occurs in the alchemical sequence between white and red. The golden bough enables the *materia* to pass through the fire unscathed, just as it enabled Aeneas to pass through hell unscathed. It may even suggest the "seeding" of the flask with gold at this point. The ladder has seven steps, which correspond to the seven planets of Plates 12–18.

Plate 6: The Alchemical Tree with Golden Boughs

[f.15v] *The third parable*

When heat operates on a moist body, first blackness (*nigredo*) should be generated. The King of Earth sinks and cries out for someone to rescue him. After the night, the morning star (Venus) breaks through the clouds, the sun shines brightly and the King is rescued. He now stands in the foreground, richly adorned and wearing a triple crown. In his right hand he holds a sceptre with the seven stars (planets). In his left hand, a golden orb and a dove.

[f.16v] PLATE 7: THE DROWNING KING

The King of Earth is drowning in a lake. He cries out, offering a reward to anyone who can save him. Having been rescued, the King now fully rejuvenated, and looking a lot younger, stands beside the lake dressed in yellow robes and ermine, holding a sceptre and orb and wearing a triple crown of iron, silver and gold. A white dove perches on the orb. Behind him is the sun, and above him is a golden star.

Frame images: Birds and a butterfly. Below are two mythological scenes, a man clubbing a satyr and a nymph.

Meaning: The drowning King of Earth is rescued by Venus (whose associated metal is copper, which suggests that copper may be a catalyst for this operation). His robes are citrine, indicating the position of this stage in the alchemical sequence between white (*albedo*) and red (*rubedo*). The triple crown may represent the three principles of Salt, Sulphur and Mercury. The King has been saved from the destructive moisture of the lake and has been renewed with essential moisture.

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Plate 7: The Drowning King

[f.17r] *The fourth parable*

Make the bodies spiritual through dissolution and then make the spiritual (vapour) corporeal by gentle cooking. A naked black man is stuck in a stinking black slime. [f.17v] He is helped out of it by a beautiful winged and crowned woman, maybe an angel. She offers to wrap the man in a cloak of purple with a gold border and raise him up.

[f.18r] PLATE 8: THE ANGEL AND THE DARK MAN IN THE SWAMP

A crowned and white-winged angel with a six-pointed star shining above her head holds out a red cloak to a dark naked man who is emerging from a swamp. His head is like a red crystal ball in this manuscript. One arm is red, the other white. The angel wears a gold necklace set with a large ruby.

Frame images: Two male deer, two monkeys, plants, flowers. The deer symbolizes resurrection, reinforcing the image of the man being saved from the swamp.

Meaning: The King of Earth sunk into a dank, foul mud is rescued and elevated by an angel offering him a covering. This is the final redemption of the *nigredo*. The man's arms signify the white and red stage, which has now been reached.

Plate 8: The Angel and the Dark Man in the Swamp

[f.18v] *The fifth parable*

The sun and the moon represent earth and water or man and woman. From these come the four elemental qualities: hot, cold, moist and dry. The fifth Element, called Magnesia (Quintessence), comes from the first four. Out of the fifth comes the Natural Stone of the Philosophers, which signals the end of the operation.

[f.19r] This is explained by the parable of the egg, in which the shell = earth; the white = water; the skin (between white and shell and between white and yolk) = air; the yolk = fire. The fertilized chick is the fifth Element. So the egg contains all the Elements.[18] The egg is also shown very clearly in the left hand of the hermaphrodite.[19]

[f.19v] PLATE 9: THE HERMAPHRODITE

A winged hermaphrodite in a black formal jacket holding an egg in its left hand and a convex mirror in its right. Its right wing is red, its left is white (echoing the red and white arms of the previous plate). It has two heads,

one male and one female, and both have a halo. His black tunic has clasps of red and gold down the front. A river, a town and the sea are in the background.
Frame images: Birds, fruit and plants.
Meaning: This plate represents *conjunctio*, "conjunction". The egg, as we see in the allegory in the text, symbolizes the four Elements. The mirror is sometimes considered to represent the whole Work, or the *prima materia*, but here, no longer at the beginning of the series, it holds a reflection of the natural landscape from which came its *prima materia*. The dualities of man and woman, and different coloured wings reaffirm that the origin of the Work lies in the conjunction of Philosophers' Sulphur and Mercury.

Plate 9: The Hermaphrodite

[f.20r] *The sixth parable*
The man with a completely white body is cut into pieces with his golden head separated from his body. The swordsman holds a piece of paper on which is written: "I have slain you, that you might possess abundant life; but your head I will conceal. Lest worldly folk should find it and lay waste the earth, I will bury your body, that it may decay, increase, and bring forth innumerable fruits." This stands for the separation of the fifth Element from the other four (the four limbs).

[f.20v] PLATE 10: THE DISMEMBERED BODY WITH A GOLDEN HEAD

A bearded man in armour with a translucent white tunic and a large sword has dismembered another man's body on the ground before him. He holds the gilded head in his left hand. The background, showing an open-sided Renaissance-style building next to a canal, is reminiscent of Venice. A pillar base shows knights riding into battle.
Frame images: Two classical vignettes showing a king (Poseidon?) driving river horses and a woman in a boat doing the same. The frame carries flowers and birds.

Meaning: Separation of the four Elements (four limbs) from the Quintessence of the golden head, which is retained.

Plate 10: The Dismembered Body with a Golden Head

[f.21r] *The seventh parable*
The old man who wishes to be young again cuts himself up and boils himself until perfectly cooked, so that his parts may be reunited and rejuvenated. This image is probably based on the story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* of Medea restoring her father-in-law, Aeson's, youth by boiling him.

[f.21v] PLATE 11: THE BOILED PHILOSOPHER REJUVENATED

A naked bearded man (similar to the man in the previous plate), with a white bird perched on his head, is being cooked in water heated by a fire that is tended by an assistant with bellows, in an ornate Renaissance courtyard. The process seems voluntary, and the bird on the man's head suggests the boiling off of vapour or spirit. A liquid is being drawn off into a flask at the side of the boiler. In two niches are statues of Jupiter and Mercury. A bas relief of Pygmalion and the sculpture he fell in love with is seen at the foot of the column.
Frame images: Plants, birds, owl, red squirrel, butterfly and a bee.
Meaning: Boiling and volatilization (symbolized by the white bird). The matter must be boiled and perfectly cooked in order to rejuvenate it.

Plate 11: The Boiled Philosopher Rejuvenated

3. The Sequence Arranged by Seven Planetary Hermetic Flasks

[f.22r] THE FOURTH TREATISE

This treatise is associated with the seven planetary flasks shown in Plates 12–18. The flasks are sometimes interpreted as the seven degrees of heat, but this is not convincing as it is clear that there are flames (or leaves) under the first three flasks but not under the last four. Instead the flasks relate to transmutation, which takes place in a seven-stage process as represented by the seven planets. First, heat is required to melt the hard-baked portions of earth. The crevices of the earth will be opened up so they can accept water. The child in the flask in Plate 12 uses bellows and adds liquid to the dragon. This indicates both that a higher heat is required and that liquid needs to be continually added to prevent the matter drying out.

[f.23r] PLATE 12: SATURN - FEEDING THE DRAGON A

crowned flask with open top[20] is heated upon flames. The flask contains a naked child who pours liquid down the throat of, and uses a pair of bellows on, a pale yellow, winged dragon. The dragon is green in other versions. The flask stands upon wreaths of leaves, but these probably should be tongues of flame.[21] Saturn is associated with lead, but also with antimony.

Outer picture images: The chariot of Saturn drawn by two winged griffons/dragons. The wheels represent Capricorn and Aquarius, the zodiacal signs ruled by Saturn, who holds a sickle and a caduceus. Saturnian scenes depicted: begging, commerce, drawing water, parchment preparation, pig castration, ploughing and a hanging. *Meaning:* Heat the *materia* but prevent it drying out by adding liquid. As Michael Maier observes, “the dragon always represents Mercury, whether it is fixed or volatile.”[22] Here Saturn is equated with the older Mercury.

[f.23v] Second, heat is needed to expel darkness from the earth and to change the dark into white and then everything white into red.

Plate 12: Saturn – Feeding the Dragon

[f.24r] PLATE 13: JUPITER - THE THREE BIRDS

A crowned flask with sealed top[23] holds three birds (red, white and black), which are following each other in cyclic succession. The birds correspond to the three stages of *nigredo* (black), *albedo* (white) and *rubedo* (red). The flask stands upon a wreath of leaves, or tongues of flame.
Outer picture images: The chariot of Jupiter (holding thunderbolts) drawn by two peacocks. A servant offers Jupiter a plate. The wheels represent Sagittarius and Pisces. Jupiterian scenes depicted: a king being crowned by the Pope, a banker's treasure chests, a counting table with gold and papers.
Meaning: The three stages of *nigredo, albedo* and *rubedo* must be repeated in order. To make volatile what is fixed.

[f.24v] Third, make volatile what is fixed. The heat in this stage encourages the matter to volatilize and rise up like the three-headed eagle in Plate 14.

Plate 13: Jupiter – The Three Birds

[f.25r] PLATE 14: THE TRIPLE-HEADED EAGLE

A crowned flask with a sealed top holds a crowned three-headed bird with wings outspread. Here the three birds are fused into one. The flask stands upon a red wreath of leaves, or tongues of flame. *Outer picture images:* The chariot of Mars (who is fully armed) drawn by two wolves, with a coiled serpent on the forepart. The wheels are Aries and Scorpio (half hidden). Martial scenes depicted: soldiers, a burning house, a battle, slain warriors, the taking of cattle (the spoils of war).
Meaning: The three stages of black, white and red are joined together, but not totally unified.

[f.25v] Fourth, heat cleanses the impurity taking away mineral excess and bad odours. Through sublimation the matter is purified. Separate the earth from the fire. The impure must be removed by cleansing, washing and separation before the operation can be completed.

Plate 14: Mars – The Triple-Headed Eagle

[f.26r] PLATE 15: SOL – THE TRIPLE-HEADED DRAGON

Within a crowned flask, sealed and not heated is a three-headed green-winged dragon. Its crowned heads are white, red and black, repeating the colour scheme of Plate 13.

Outer picture images: The chariot of the Sun (crowned) drawn by two horses with golden harness. There is only one wheel, which represents Leo. This is because Leo is the only sign ruled by the sun. Solar scenes depicted: duelling, disputing, wrestling. At the bottom there is a diplomatic scene showing a Turkish envoy and a mounted horseman.

Meaning: Heat cleanses impurity through sublimation. The change of symbolism from birds to dragons signifies a change from evaporation to sublimation.

Then the heat is removed and the top of the flask is sealed.[24]

[f.26v] Fifth, the heat is increased and the latent spirit in the earth brought forth.

Plate 15: Sol – The Triple-Headed Dragon

[f.28r] PLATE 16: VENUS – THE PEACOCK

Within a crowned flask, sealed and not heated, a peacock displays its tail. This stage in the alchemical process produces very beautiful, rapidly changing colours on the walls of the flask.

Outer picture images: The chariot of Venus (with Eros and a heart transfixed by a golden arrow) drawn by two doves. The wheels represent Taurus and Libra. Venusian scenes depicted: swimmers, lovers, drinking and eating, playing music, reading, dancing. Below there are three people dining with five musicians playing for them *Meaning:* The peacock

symbolizes the iridescent colourings that form in the flask during sublimation.

Plate 16: Venus – The Peacock

[f.27r] PLATE 17: MERCURY - THE WHITE QUEEN[25]

Within a crowned flask with open top, the white-crowned, bare-breasted Queen stands holding an orb and sceptre within a golden egg-shaped aura with an inner yellow band and outer blue band.[26] She stands on a deflated solar face. Her sceptre is the same as the ones held by Ahasuerus in Plate 5 and the King saved from drowning in Plate 7.

Outer picture images: The chariot of Mercury with caduceus wand and sickle (a reference to Saturn) drawn by two cocks. The wheels represent Virgo and Gemini. Mercurial scenes depicted: masons, geometers, geographers, scholars, musicians.

Meaning: The White Queen (*albedo*) who appeared in Plate 4 turns "all imperfect metals into the purest silver".[27] This alludes to the formation of the White Tincture (which relates to the moon).

[f.27v] Seventh, the heat warms the cold earth. This must be distilled seven times to separate the corruptible moisture, but it is really only one distillation. The Queen in the flask represents the White Stone.

[f.28v] Sixth, the heat dissolves the congealed part, so that it rises above the other elements. The steam with iridescent colours rises up. The heat is mollified with the coldness of the moon, which extinguishes the fire with its coldness.

Plate 17: Mercury – The White Queen

[f.29r] PLATE 18: LUNA – THE RED KING[28]

Within a crowned flask now again with sealed top, the King stands on an upturned lunar crescent, with an orb and sceptre in hand, bathed in a golden glow.
Outer picture images: The chariot of the moon (holding a lunar crescent) drawn by two girls. Only one set of wheels, representing Cancer, as the moon rules only one sign. Lunar scenes depicted: travelling, hawking, shooting, fishing.
Meaning: The Red King (*rubedo*), who also appeared in Plate 4, represents the end of the operation. The Red King turns "all imperfect metals into the purest gold". This alludes to the formation of the Red Tincture.

An aside on heat
[f.29v] The three degrees of heat are represented by the three fire signs of the zodiac, Aries, Leo and Sagittarius. The three degrees of heat produce different distillates even from the same material. In modern times this separation into three different distillates is achieved using a fractionating column. In times past a Balneum Mariae (a water bath) would have provided temperatures below 100 degrees Celsius, while lower levels of heat were often achieved by placing the flask in the warmth of rotting horse dung.

Plate 18: Luna – The Red King

[f.30r] 4. The Sequence as Expressed in Four Stages

1. Solution: The body is dissolved and becomes Philosophers' Quicksilver. The Quicksilver releases Sulphur, which is then recombined and compacted with it. This is the mortification of the moist with the dry, otherwise known as putrefaction. The colour of this stage is black.

[f.30v] PLATE 19: THE DARKNESS OF THE PUTREFIED SUN
In a bleak wintry landscape with dead trees, a dark sun is setting behind a hill.

Frame images: Butterflies, caterpillars, snails, birds, frog, dragonfly. *Meaning:* This represents gold obscured in the earth, in nature, awaiting the alchemist.

Plate 19: The Darkness of the
Putrefied Sun

[f.31r] *2. Coagulation:* This changes the water into the body again. In order that the Sulphur should be separated again from the Quicksilver, and that it should again take the Quicksilver and draw the earth and the body to itself out of the water, it is necessary that many different colours appear, as the qualities of the operative agent change. Hence the art is likened to the games of children, who when they play turn everything topsy-turvy.

[f.31v] PLATE 20: CHILD'S PLAY

An indoor scene with seven naked and three clothed children at play with a hobby horse and cushion, watched by two adults. There is a large middle European ceramic stove at the back.
Frame images: Birds, plants, catterpillars, butterflies, dragonfly, snail, beetle, strawberries.
Meaning: Alchemy is like child's play.[29]

Plate 20: Child's Play

[f.32r] *3. Sublimation:* In which the earth has its water removed, as sheets are dried in the sun. If the water in the earth is reduced, it escapes as vapour and rises in an egg-shaped cloud. This is the spirit of the Quintessence, the so-called Tincture, Ferment, Soul or Oil, which is a stage closer to the Philosophers' Stone. Sublimation produces ashes, which remain calcined at the bottom of the flask, fiery in nature. This is the real philosophical sublimation by which the perfect whiteness is achieved. As the art involves cooking and roasting (like a meal) and washing of the residue until it becomes white (like a sheet), it is sometimes compared to women's work.

[f.32v] PLATE 21: WOMEN'S WORK

A village scene showing women washing clothes in a stream and hanging sheets up to dry or laying them out on the grass.
Frame images: Birds, flowers, butterfly, fruit.
Meaning: Alchemy is just "women's work", like cooking and washing.

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Plate 21: Women's Work

[f.33r] *4. Separation*: The separation of water from the earth, and its reunion with the earth.

[f.33v] PLATE 22: THE RED SUN

This plate shows a tired but radiant sun rising above the horizon in the countryside. There is a city in the background. See Plate 19. *Frame images:* Birds, flowers, butterfly, fruit.
Meaning: Gold is triumphant, elevated above the earth by the alchemist.

These four passages on solution, coagulation, sublimation and separation summarize the operation of the whole Work, and are not part of the earlier planetary sequence. They are followed by texts on specific technical topics, which do not have their own illustrations.

[f.34r] *On the regulation of the fire*
The sun is hot and dry, the moon cold and moist.

[f.34v] This section explains the various degrees of heat:

1. Mild and moderate until the matter has blackened, then changed to white, like the temperature at the end of Aries (April).[30]
2. When white appears, the temperature should be increased to the heat of the sun at the end of Taurus (May) until complete desiccation is achieved.
3. When the Stone is dried and turned to ashes, the fire is again increased until the matter is completely red. This heat is exemplified by the sun's heat in Leo (July/August).

Plate 22: The Red Sun

[f.35v] *On the colours that appear in the preparation of the Stone*

THE FIFTH TREATISE

The colour sequence is a very important indicator of the sequence of the operation. It is said that twice it turns black, twice it turns yellow and twice red. The first perfect colour is black, which manifests with the very mildest heat. During the “cooking” many other colours appear. The three main colours appear in the three heads of the dragon in Plate 15. Between these other colours appear, especially a yellow or citrine colour after the white. This does not last as long as the black, white and red, which may last for over four days.

Cook your mixture until you see it turning white, quench it in vinegar, and then divide the black from the white (separation). The white is a sign that the operation is approaching fixation. The white must also be removed from the black by the fire of calcination. When the temperature rises the superfluous part separates itself and a crude substance remains beneath the material of the Stone, like a black ball of earth that no longer mingles with the pure and subtle matter of the Stone. The more the colours change, the stronger you should make the fire, so that the matter no longer “fears” the fire, once it is fixed by the white. One should not extract the white Magnesia (magnesium oxide) until the whole colour cycle is complete.

The last two treatises, separated from the rest by a blank folio, have a markedly different structure and are not illustrated.

[f.38v] *On the properties of the whole work of preparing the Stone*

THE SIXTH TREATISE

This treatise summarizes the whole process starting again at the beginning. One of the best-known alchemical sequences of 12 stages was delineated by George Ripley, Canon of Bridlington (*c*. 1415–90) in his *Twelve Gates of Alchemy*.

Many, but not all, of these stages are to be found in the sixth treatise but in a different order:

1. Calcination is the first step.
2. Separation of the Elements to extract the Quintessence.
3. Sublimation consists of vaporization and re-condensation, in which the Quintessence is extracted from the Elemental “faeces”, the remaining solid matter.[31]
4. Ablution of the blackness and the stench.
5. Putrefaction. The material’s initial appearance is destroyed, and what was concealed within it is made manifest.
6. Trituration, in which the material is crushed to powder.
7. Decoction is boiling to concentrate the metallic waters.
8. Assation, or roasting drives off the moisture.
9. Distillation clarifies the matter.
10. Coagulation/Congelation completes the Work.
11. Multiplication and projection are strangely passed over in silence.

[f.41v] THE SEVENTH TREATISE

This treatise consists mainly of diverse quotations from other alchemical works with little apparent structure. The authorities quoted include Albertus Magnus, Alexander, Alphidius, Aristotle, Artos (Hortulanus), Avicenna, Baltheus, Calid (Khalid), Ciliator, Constantine, Ferrarius, Galen, Pseudo-Geber, Hali, Hermes, Hippocrates, Lucas, Menaldus, Miraldus, Morienus, Ovid, Pythagoras, Rhases, Rosinos (Zosimus), Senior Zadith (Muhammad ibn Umail al-Tamini), Socrates and Virgil. It is interesting that most of these are Arabic or Greek sources, all are from before 1400 and there are no specifically Christian references or images in the book.

The author hints at “fiery water”, a universal solvent that Lapidus refers to as “Sophic fire”. [f.42r] Following this are comments on the Philosopher’s Quicksilver and Mercury, salt, alkaline salt, alum, vitriol, black sulphur, lead, red lead and sal ammoniac (ammonium chloride), most of which ingredients have not been mentioned earlier.

THE BENEFITS OF THE STONE

[f.46r] The benefits claimed for this art are fourfold.

1. Health. It is claimed that if one takes the elixir (in a warm drink) it will make you well. It reputedly heals paralysis, dropsy, leprosy, jaundice, heart palpitations, colic, fever, epilepsy, the gripes, and many other diseases and disorders.
2. Metal transmutation. The text here talks of making any silver completely golden in colour, substance and weight, and identical in melting, softness, and hardness to gold, rather than transmuting base metals.
3. Stone transmutation. A property seldom mentioned in alchemical texts is to make all common stones into precious stones such as jasper, jacinth, red and white corals, emerald, chrysolite and sapphire, crystals, carbuncles, ruby and topaz.
4. The ability to make glass malleable and easily coloured.

In conclusion

Splendor solis is an amazing work of alchemy and artistry, but one that requires close study to discover its secrets. Its symbolism does not appear to be consistently applied (there being four distinct sequences), and there is some deliberate obfuscation (for example in the sixth treatise). Its images contain a lot of details that are not commented on in the text, and remarks in the text that are not illustrated. Nevertheless, it marks a high point in alchemical imagery. The main thing to keep in mind is that the author's primary purpose was to describe how to take a raw *prima materia* from nature and speed up its "evolution" to the point where the Philosophers' Stone is created.

There are no comments about the spiritual state of the alchemist nor is there any overt Christian imagery, although these components feature in many later works on alchemy. Similarly, this author does not draw any parallels between the physical process and psychological interpretations of the images. To get the most from *Splendor solis*, do not look for what is not there. Instead, delight in the richly allegorical images and the 16th-century alchemical wisdom that is to be found in this manuscript.

[1] Where sulphur and mercury/quicksilver are capitalized, it should be understood that these terms refer to the alchemist's Philosophical Sulphur and Mercury, not to the ordinary chemical elements.

[2] This is often translated as "weapons of the art", but "arms of the art" (i.e. of alchemy) is more correct

[3] The correct Latin rendering should probably have been Eamus Quesitum Quatuor Elementorum Naturas. I assume that this is a mistake by the artist rather than a code containing secret meaning.

[4] The term in the original German is das Grünen (literally, "greening").

[5] The liquid "secret fire", which some have incorrectly interpreted as acid.

[6] Made of a regulus of iron and antimony.

[7] The Latin is probably meant to be *Masculinum Coagula*.

[8] Image from the Rosarium philosophorum ("Rose Garden of the Philosophers"), first printed in 1550.

[9] Alexander is referenced on f.46v in connection with the Universal Medicine.

[10] The basilisk is a fabulous snake-like creature hatched from a hen's egg. Its powdered blood was reputed to be one of the ingredients (along with human blood, red copper and vinegar) in the process of turning copper to gold. The basilisk is also sometimes interpreted as the *prima materia*.

[11] Diogenes' father minted gold coins. He was also said to have met Alexander.

[12] This term occurs in the Rosicrucian classic The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz (1616).

[13] The alchemists thought stone was created from soil, but geologists know that soil is created by the weathering of stone. Both understand that there is a causal relationship between soil and stone.

[14] Some scholars have taken this as evidence that the author was Jewish.

[15] This parable has an aside relating to the plant *lunatica* or *berissa*, which seems like a later insertion. The short recipe suggests that if you put this plant in mercury and boil, it changes into silver and then into gold. The process is said to multiply mercury into gold a hundredfold.

[16] Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book VI.

[17] The earliest known manuscript of *Splendor solis* dates from 1531.

[18] This is just a parable, but one which sidetracked many alchemists, who attempted to drain thousands of eggs and extract the Elements from them. John Dee was among those led astray in this manner.

[19] Possibly the first example of a hermaphrodite used in an alchemical context occurs in Ulmannus's *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit* ("Book of the Holy Trinity"), dating from 1410–1416.

[20] It appears sealed in the Harley manuscript, but open in other versions.

[21] This is confirmed by its representation in one printed version and several other Splendor solis manuscripts.

[22] *Atalanta fugiens*, Oppenheim, 1617.

[23] The flask is open in other versions.

[24] This change in the state of the flask is more clearly depicted in the black-andwhite Rorschach printed edition of 1598.

[25] Venus and Mercury have been bound in the manuscript in the wrong order – Mercury then Venus. They have here been adjusted to the usual order of Venus then Mercury.

[26] Blue was sometimes used to represent the Quintessence stage following the *rubedo*.

[27] *Donum Dei* (“Gift of God”), 15th century.

[28] Intuitively, the Queen seems more appropriate to *Luna*.

[29] The *Rosarium philosophorum* (1550) says that the achievement of the alchemical operation is like “women’s work and the play of children”, a statement clearly echoed in Plates 20 and 21.

[30] Presumably this is referring to the climate in Germany.

[31] From this arises the Philosophers’ Sulphur. It is a metallic water and an elixir or tincture of the Red Stone and the White Stone.

Translation of the Harley Manuscript

Joscelyn Godwin

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: *The text of the Harleian manuscript is very different from the later, printed versions of the treatise, notably the Rorschach edition of 1598 which was the basis of my previously published translation (Edinburgh: Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks, 1981). The two sources often use words that sound alike in German but have entirely different meanings. Sometimes their statements contradict each other, and there is no resemblance in their punctuation, which greatly affects the meaning. The present translation, therefore, should not be regarded as the definitive one, but, like the sources themselves, as one possible version of a lost original text.*

[f.1r] The present book is called *Splendor solis*, or the Sun's Radiance. It is divided into seven treatises through which is described the artful operation of the hidden [f.1v] Stone of the ancient sages; whereby everything that nature clearly provides for accomplishing the whole work will be understood, together with all the means for the thing in hand; for no one is able through his own understanding to possess the secret of the Noble Art.

PREFACE

[f.2v] First, there follows the preface of this book.

Alphidius, one of the ancient sages, says: "If someone is unable to accomplish something in the art of the Philosophers' Stone, it were better for him not to throw himself into it at all than to attempt it partially." Rhases gives the same advice in the book *Lumen luminum*, and it should be carefully heeded: "I hereby exhort you most strongly that no one should dare to attempt the ignorant mingling of the elements." Rosinus agrees with this, saying: "All who venture upon this art, lacking intelligence and discernment of the things that the Philosophers have written in their books, will err beyond measure. For the Philosophers have grounded this art in a natural beginning, but a concealed operation."

It is evident, however, that all corporeal things [f.3r] derive their origin, condition, and being from the earth, according to the laws of time, so that the influence of the stars or planets (the sun, moon and the others) together with the four qualities of the elements, which are in ceaseless agitation, are active in them. By this means each and every growing and fruitful thing is brought forth with the species and form appropriate to its own substance, just as it was constituted and ordained by God the Creator at the beginning.

All metals, accordingly, also derive their origin from the earth, having flowed together into a separate and specific material from the four qualities of the four Elements, with the implantation of the metallic forces, the entire influence of the planets serving the process. Aristotle, the Natural Master, describes it as such in the fourth book of his *Meteors*, where he tells how quicksilver is a matter common to all metals. But it should be known that the first thing in nature is the matter assembled from the four Elements, through nature's own knowledge and property. [3v] The Philosophers call this matter Mercury or Quicksilver. But how this mercury, through the operation of nature, achieves a perfected form of gold, silver or other metals is not told here. The natural teachers describe it adequately in their books. On this the whole art of the Stone of the Wise is based and grounded, for it has its inception in nature, and from it follows a natural conclusion in the proper form, through proper natural means.

[f.4v] Here follows the origin of the Stone of the ancient sages, and how it becomes perfected through art.

THE FIRST TREATISE

This Stone of the Wise is achieved through the way of greening nature. Hali the Philosopher speaks of it, saying that this Stone arises in growing and greening things. When the greening is reduced to its natural state, thereby a thing ripens, comes forth, and becomes green at the preordained time. For this one must cook and putrefy it after the manner and secrets of the art, so that by art one affords assistance to nature. It then cooks and putrefies by itself until time gives it [f.5r] its proper form. Art is nothing but a handmaid and preparer of the natures of the matter that nature fits for such a work, together with the suitable vessels and measuring of the operation, with judicious intelligence. For as the art does not presume to create gold and silver from nothing, so it cannot give things their first beginning. Thus one

also need not seek through art the natural places and caverns of the minerals, since they have their first beginning in the earth. Art has a different method and interpretation from nature's, hence it also has a different instrument. Thus this art possesses a wondrous thing, its beginnings rooted in nature, to which nature cannot give birth by itself; for nature by itself cannot produce the thing through which the metals, imperfectly made by nature, can be made rapidly and perfectly. But through the secrets of the art they can be born from the proper matter through nature. [f.5v] Nature serves art, and then again art serves nature, with a timely instrument and a certain operation. It knows what kind of formation is agreeable to nature, and how much of it should be done by art, so that through art this Stone may attain its form. Still, the form is from nature, for the actual form of each and every thing that grows, animate or metallic, arises out of the inner power of the matter. The human soul alone does not.

It should, however, be noted that the essential form may not arise in matter, but comes to pass through the operation of an accidental form: not through the latter's power, but by the power of another effective substance such as fire, or some other warmth acting upon it. Hence we use the allegory of a hen's egg, wherein the essential form of the chick arises from the accidental form, which is a mixture of the red and the white, by the power of warmth which works on the egg from the brood-hen. And although the egg's matter is from the hen, nevertheless no form arises therein, either essential or accidental, except through putrefaction, which happens with the aid of warmth. [f.6r] Thus also in the natural matter of the aforementioned Stone, neither the accidental nor the essential form arises without putrefaction or cooking. What manner of putrefaction this is follows next.

Decay or putrefaction may occur in something through external heat: thus the natural heat or warmth of a moist thing is drawn out. Putrefaction likewise takes place through excessive cooling, so that the natural heat is destroyed by excessive cold. This is actually a mortification, for such a thing loses its natural warmth, and such putrefaction finally takes place in moist things. The Philosophers do not speak of this putrefaction, but their putrefaction is a moistening or soaking whereby dry things attain their former state from which they are able to become green and grow. In putrefaction the moisture is united with the dryness and not destroyed, so that the moist holds the dry [f.6v] part together; and this is actually a

trituration. But in order that the moist should be utterly divided from the dry, the dry part must be separated and turned to ashes.

The Philosophers do not desire this incineration either. They want their putrefaction, their soaking, trituration and calcination to occur in such a way that the natural moisture and dryness are united with one another, freed from superfluous moisture. The destructive portion is extracted, just as the food which enters an animal's stomach is cooked and destroyed, and out of it are extracted the nutritive force and moisture whereby its nature is sustained and increased, and the superfluous part discarded. Even so, every entity desires to be nourished in accordance with its own nature. The same should be observed in the aforesaid Philosophers' Stone.

[f.7v] Now follows information concerning the matter and nature of the blessed Stone of the Philosophers.

THE SECOND TREATISE

Morienus says: "You should know that the whole work of this art ends with two operations. They depend on one another, so that when one is accomplished the second can be begun, and when that is finished, the whole mastery is achieved. But they act only upon their own matter." To understand this properly one should know first that, as Geber says in his *Summa* concerning the creation of metals, nature makes the metals out of mercury and sulphur. Ferrarius says the same in the question on alchemy, in the 25th chapter: that nature proceeds thus from the beginning of the natural metals. She puts in the fire a slimy, heavy water, and mixes with it a very white, volatile, light earth. This resolves it into a steam or vapour, and arouses it in the veins or clefts of the earth. She cooks or steams the moisture and dryness together, until a substance comes therefrom which is called Quicksilver. Now this is the property and the very first matter of the metals, as we said above. Ferrarius speaks of it again in the 26th chapter, where he says that whoever desires to follow nature should not take quicksilver alone, but quicksilver and sulphur mingled together. Do not combine the common quicksilver and sulphur, but those which nature has combined, well prepared, and decocted to a sweet fluid. In such a quicksilver, nature has begun with the first operation, and ended in a metallic nature. At that point she has ceased, having finished her work, and thus left it for art to consummate in a perfect Philosophers' Stone.

In [f.8v] these words is made known to one who would proceed aright in this art what all the Philosophers say: that he should begin where nature has left off, and take the sulphur and quicksilver which nature has united in their purest form. For in them has taken place the very rapid union which otherwise no one could achieve through art. All this nature has done for the procreation of the metallic form.

Now this same matter which is thus informed by nature serves the art well for receiving the forces which lie within such volatile matter. Therefore some alchemists calcinate the gold in order to bring it to dissolution, and separate the elements until they reduce it to a similarly volatile spirit or subtle nature, and a fatty vapour of the nature of quicksilver and sulphur. Then it is the very next thing, most closely to be compared with gold, to receive the form of the hidden Philosophers' Stone. This matter is called Philosophers' Mercury. Of it Aristotle says in his speech to King Alexander: "Choose for our Stone that with which [f.9r] kings are adorned and crowned." For this Mercury is the one and only matter, and a thing unique. When mixed with other things, it is so manifold in its operations and in its names that none can search it out. And that, as Rosinus says, is in order that not everyone may obtain it. It is simultaneously a work, an operation and a vessel that multiplies everything; hence the comparison to all things that are to be found in nature.

For thus the Philosophers say: "Dissolve the thing. Then sublimate it, distil and coagulate it; make it rise and fall; soak it and dry it out. The manipulations which they name are without number, yet they must all be completed together, at one time and in a single vessel." This Alphidius confirms, saying: "You should know that when we dissolve we also sublime and calcinate without any interruption. We purify and make ready our work."

And he goes on to say: "When our Corpus is cast into the water to be dissolved, it first becomes black and falls apart, and turns to a chalk. It dissolves itself and sublimes itself. When it is sublimed and dissolved, it is united with the spirit, which is its beginning and [f.9v] birth." It is worthy to be compared to everything in the world: to all things visible or invisible; having soul, or none; corporeal and animate; dead and alive; mineral and vegetable; to the elements and their compounds; hot and cold things; all colours, all fruits, all birds; in sum, to everything that can exist in earth and heaven. Among all these, there belong to this art the two operations

mentioned above. The Philosophers signify them by the two words woman and man, or milk and cream. He who does not understand these knows nothing yet of the decoction of this art. And now enough has been said for a start on the first manipulation of this art.

[f.10v] Now follows that whereby the whole work of this art or mastery ends; and it is shown with certain parables, figures, discourses, and many sayings of the Philosophers.

[f.11r] THE THIRD TREATISE

The first parable Hermes, a Father of the Philosophers, says: “It is necessary that at the end of this world heaven and earth should come together,” meaning by heaven and earth the two manipulations mentioned above. But many accidents occur in the work before they are brought to completion. This may be understood through the parables and figures, as follows. Here is the first parable.

God first created the earth plain, flat, fat and very fruitful of gravel, sand, stone, hill and valley. Through the influence of the planets and the operation of nature the earth has now been transformed into manifold shapes: outwardly into hard rocks, high hills and deep valleys; inwardly into rare things and colours, such as [f.11v] the ores and their origins. With such things the earth has changed utterly from its first form, and this has been brought about in the following way. At first, when the earth was heaped up so big, deep, long, wide and broad, the steady action of the sun’s heat caused therein a sulphurous, vaporous and steamy warmth that penetrated and permeated the whole earth right to the depths. Then the absorbed heat of the sun caused to arise from the coldness and humidity of the earth a strong vapour or smoke, misty and airy. All these were enclosed in the earth. In the course of time they became too much for it, until at length they were so strong that the earth could not and would not contain them any longer. Then it desired naturally to deliver itself of them. Finally, in the regions of the earth where they were most concentrated, they heaved up one part of its surface here, another there, and many a hill and deep valley was [f.12r] made.

In the regions where such hills and mountains were made, the earth is at its very best, with its heat, cold, moisture and dryness cooked, seethed and intermingled; and there, too, the best ore is found. But where the earth is

flat, none of those vapours and smoke have arisen. Therefore ore is not found there, and the soil dug up is extraordinarily slimy, loamy and fat. It has drunk in the moisture from above, whereby it has then been softened again, and has set fast like dough. Through drying by the sun's heat and through length of time it becomes more and more set, hardened and baked. But in the region where it is friable and inert like fine gravel or sand, is still soft and sticks together like grapes, this earth is too meagre in fatty substance and too dry, and has too little moisture. Hence it is not sufficiently baked [f.12v] but is lumpy like unmilled meal, or like a mealy dough which is too little watered. For no soil can become stone unless it be a rich slimy earth, well filled with moisture.

When the sun's heat dries out the water, the moisture is retained in the earth. Otherwise it would remain inert and friable and fall apart again. That which is not altogether hardened may still do so even today, through the steady working of nature and the sun's heat, and so become firm stone.

The aforementioned smoke and mist, which were first yielded by the qualities of the elements enclosed in the depths of the earth, are cooked by nature and the influence of the sun and other planets. And as they seize upon the watery vapour with a pure, subtle, soily substance, then the Philosophers' Quicksilver is formed. But if it hardens and reaches a fiery, earthy, [f.13r] subtle hardness, the Philosophers' Sulphur is formed. Hermes aptly says of this sulphur: it will receive the powers of the highest and lowest planets, and with its power it pierces solid things; it overpowers all things, even all precious stones.

[f.14r] The second parable

Hermes, the first master of this art, speaks thus: "The water of the air which is between heaven and earth is the life of everything, for through its moisture and warmth it is the mean between the two contraries, fire and water." And the same water has rained down upon the earth. Heaven has opened and bedewed the earth, whereby it is made sweet as honey and moistened. Therefore it blooms and brings forth sundry colours and fruits, and in its midst there has grown up a great tree with a silver trunk, which spreads over that part of the earth. On its branches divers birds were perching, which all flew away toward daybreak; and the raven's head was turned to white. The same tree brings forth threefold fruits: the first are the [f.14v] very finest pearls; the second are called by the Philosophers *terra foliata*; the third is the very finest gold. This tree also gives forth healing

fruit: it warms what is cold, and cools what is hot; it makes the dry moist, and the moist dry. The hard it makes soft, and the soft hard, and is the end of the whole art. Of it the author of the *Liber trium verborum* says: “The three fruits are three precious words of the whole mastery.”

This is also Galen’s opinion, for he says of the herb *lunatica* or *berissa*: “Its root is a metallic earth; it has a red stem, flecked with black, grows easily and fades easily. It also acquires citrine blossoms. If one puts it for three days into mercury, it changes into perfect silver; and if one boils it further, it turns into gold. This same gold turns a hundred parts of mercury into the very finest gold.” Virgil tells us of this tree in the sixth book of the Aeneid, where he relates in his tale how Aeneas and Silvius went to a tree which had golden boughs, and as often as one broke a branch off, another grew in the same place.

[f.15v] The third parable

Avicenna says in the chapter on moistures: “When the heat operates in a moist body, a blackness should first result.” For this reason the ancient sages beheld a distant mist emerge, which covered and darkened the whole earth. They saw, too, the restlessness of the sea, and flooding over the face of the earth which become foul and stinking in the darkness. They also saw the King of Earth sink, and heard him call with beseeching voice: “Whoever rescues me will live with me forever and reign in my splendour on my royal throne!” And night enshrouded all things. The next day they seemed to see a morning star arise above the King, and the light of day [f.16r] illuminate the darkness. The bright sun broke through the clouds in manifold colours with its rays and lustre, and a fragrant scent surpassing all balm arose from the earth, while the sun shone brightly. Then the time was fulfilled when the King of all the earth was rescued and renewed. He was richly adorned and altogether comely; the sun and moon marvelled at his beauty. He was crowned with three precious crowns: one of iron, the second of silver, the third of bright gold. In his right hand they beheld a sceptre with seven stars which all gave off a golden radiance. In his left hand was a golden orb whereon perched a white dove with silver-coloured feathers and wings of golden hue. Of it Aristotle spoke well, saying: “The corruption of anything is the generation of something else.” This has been said much in this masterly art: “Deprive it of the destructive moisture and renew it with its essential moisture, which will be its perfection and life.”

[f.17r] The fourth parable

Menaldus the Philosopher speaks thus: “I enjoin all my followers to make the bodies spiritual through dissolution, and again to make the spiritual things corporeal, by gentle cooking.” Senior also speaks thereof: “The spirit dissolves the body, and in this dissolution it draws out the soul from the body, and changes the body into the soul. And the soul is transformed into the spirit, and the spirit must again be united with the body. Thus it is fixed with the body, and the body spiritualized anew in the power of the spirit.” This the Philosophers give one to understand in the parable that follows. They saw a man, black as a Moor, who was stuck in clay or filthy, black, foul-smelling slime. There came to his aid a [f.17v] young woman, fair of face and fairer still of body, most prettily apparelled with clothes of many colours and adorned with white wings upon her back. The feathers were like the most glorious white peacock’s, with golden eyes and quills ornamented with fine pearls. On her head she had a crown of pure gold, and on the crown a silver star. Around her neck she had a necklace of fine gold, with a most magnificent ruby set therein, which no king could purchase. She had on her feet golden shoes, and from her came the most sublime fragrance, surpassing all aromas. She clothed the man with a purple garment, raised him to his highest glory, and led him with her to heaven. Of this Senior says: “It is a living thing that dies no more, for it is endowed with everlasting increase.”

[f.18v] The fifth parable

The Philosophers attribute two bodies to this art, namely sun and moon, which are earth and water. They are also called man and woman, and they bring forth four children: two boys who are hot and cold, and two girls who are moist and dry. These are the four Elements. And they make the fifth essence: the white Magnesia, which is no falsity. Senior concludes the same, saying: “When these five are assembled, they will become a single thing, out of which the Natural Stone is made.” Avicenna says: “If we can attain the fifth, then the end is come.”

To help us understand this, the Philosophers describe an egg in which four things are conjoined. The first and [f.19r] outermost one is the shell (the earth) and the white is water. But the skin between the water and the shell is air, and it divides the earth from the water. The yolk is fire; it has around it a subtle membrane which is the most subtle air. It is warmer and subtler because it is nearer the fire, and separates fire and water. In the

middle of the yolk is the fifth, out of which the young chick comes forth and grows. Thus an egg contains all the forces together with the material out of which the perfect nature is created, and that will also be so in this noble art.

[20r] The sixth parable

Rosinus has shown a vision he had of a man who was dead; and the most remarkable thing was that his body was completely white like salt. His body was cut in pieces, and his head was of fine gold but sundered from the body. By him stood a monstrous man, ghastly of aspect and black, a twoedged sword in his right hand, stained with blood. In his left hand he held a paper on which was written: “I have slain you, that you might possess abundant life; but your head I will conceal. Lest worldly folk should find it and lay waste the earth, I will bury your body, that it may decay, increase, and bring forth innumerable fruits.”

[21r] The seventh parable

Ovid, the ancient Roman, indicated something similar when he wrote of the wise old man who wanted to be made young again. He is said to have had himself cut up and boiled until he was perfectly cooked, and no more, then his members would unite again and be rejuvenated with great strength.

[22r] Here follows the special quality through which nature performs her operation.

THE FOURTH TREATISE

Aristotle in his book on generation says that the sun and the man generate a human being; for the power and spirit of the sun give life. And this takes place in a sevenfold manner, with the influence of the sun’s heat. But as the Philosophers in their work must assist nature with art, so also they must [f.22v] artificially regulate a heat corresponding to the sun’s heat on which they can generate the Stone. And this also takes place in a sevenfold manner.

First, this work requires a heat such as will soften and melt the portions of earth which have become thick and hardbaked. Socrates says thereof: “The pores and crevices in the portion of soil will be opened, so that it may take into itself the power of fire and water.”

[f.23v] Second, a heat is needed by whose power all darkness is expelled from the earth, and so it lights up. Senior says thereof: “The heat

makes every black thing white, and every white thing red." Just as the water also whitens, the fire also illuminates. Thereupon the subtilized earth takes on the colour of a ruby, through the tincturing spirit that it receives from the force of the fire. Of such Socrates says: "You will behold a wondrous light in the darkness."

[f.24v] Third, the heat brings into every earthly thing a spiritual power, of which is written in the *Turba*: "Make the bodies spiritual, and make volatile what is fixed." Of such an operation Rhases says in the *Lumen luminum*: "One cannot make weightless anything that is heavy without the help of the weightless thing; nor can weightless bodies be pressed down without the presence of the heavy."

[f.25v] Fourth, the heat cleanses and sunders the impurity, for it takes away the mineral excess and all bad odours, and nourishes the elixir. Of this Hermes says: "You should separate what is gross from the subtle, the earth from the fire." Alphidius speaks of it thus: "The earth lets itself be melted and becomes fire." Rhases says: "There are certain purifications of the thing that must take place before the final preparation, which are called mundification, ablution, and separation. The operation cannot be completed until the impure parts are removed."

[f.26v] Fifth, the heat is raised, then by the power of the heat the latent spirit in the earth is brought forth into the air; wherefore the Philosophers say: "Whosoever can bring forth a hidden thing is a master of this art." Morienus agrees, for he says: "Whosoever can quicken the soul will see its colour." And Alphidius says: "This steam must rise up, or you will get nothing from it."

[Translator's note: In the manuscript, the seventh operation precedes the sixth.]

[f.27v] Seventh, the heat warms the cold earth, half dead with cold. As Socrates says: "The heat when it penetrates makes subtle every earthly thing which serves for the matter," but in no final form as long as the excessive heat continues to work on the matter. The Philosophers mention this briefly: "Distil seven times so as to separate the corruptible moisture; and it all takes place in one distillation."

[f.28v] Sixth, the power of the heat on the earth is increased so that its congealed part is dissolved, and made light so that it rises above the other elements. Hence the heat should be mollified with the coldness of the

moon. Of this Calid says: “Extinguish the fire of one thing with the coldness of another.”

[f.29v] The author of the *Liber trium verborum* gives in his writings an extra instruction for regulating the heat, or the fire, saying: “When the sun is in Aries, he indicates the first degree, which is mild with regard to heat and is ordered by the water. But when the sun is in Leo he is hotter and indicates the second degree; and that is because of the great coldness of the water, and is ordered by the air. In Sagittarius is the third degree: it is not a consuming heat, and is ordered in the air, or is a repose and stillness.” Now follows the manifold operation of the whole Work, contained in four short chapters to be more easily understood.

The first thing proper to the art of alchemy is solution. For the law of nature requires that the body be turned into a water, that is, into a quicksilver which is so much talked about. The quicksilver releases the sulphur which is joined and compacted with it. This separation is nothing less than a mortification of the moist with the dry, and is actually the putrefaction; and the same will make the matter black.

[f.31r] The second thing is coagulation, which changes the water into the body again, and is so much talked about. In order that the sulphur should be separated again from the quicksilver, and that it should again take the quicksilver and draw the earth and the body to itself out of the water, it is necessary that many different colours appear, as the qualities of the operative agent change. It must be changed by the manipulation of the passive thing, because in this dissolution the quicksilver is as it were active, whereas in the coagulation it is worked upon as passive. Hence the art is likened to the games of children, who when they play turn everything topsy-turvy.

[f.32r] The third is sublimation, through which this aforesaid earth is distilled of its moisture. For if the water in the earth is reduced, it is given up to the vapours of the air, and rises above the earth as a longish cloud resembling an egg. This is the spirit of the Quintessence, the so-called Tincture, Ferment, Soul, or the Oil; and it is the proximate matter to the Philosophers’ Stone. For through sublimation the ashes result, which by their own God-given power dissolve in the moderation of the fire. Thus the earth remains calcined at the bottom of the flask, fiery in nature and quality, and that is the real philosophical sublimation by which the perfect

whiteness is achieved. Therefore they compare this art to women's work; that is, washing until it becomes white, cooking and roasting until it is done.

[f.33r] The fourth and last thing needful is that this water be separated from the earth, and again united with the earth. Both must occur if the Stone is to be perfected. For inasmuch as everything in natural objects is combined or compounded in a body, it must also be a single composition.

In the preceding four chapters is contained everything about which the Philosophers have filled the world with countless books.

[f.34r] On the regulation of the fire If a thing is deprived of heat, there will be no mobility in it. In proper order, the father should change into the son. As is often said, the spiritual is made corporeal, the volatile fixed, or the sun and moon have come home. Of these two planets Senior speaks thus: "I am a hot and dry Sun and thou, Luna, art cold and moist; and that we may rise in the rank of the oldest ones, a burning light shall be poured upon us." That is, through the teaching and mastery of the ancients, the renewal of the moisture will be received and sun and moon will become pellucid.

In the *Scala philosophorum* it is thus written of the fire: [f.34v] "The heat or the fire of the whole work is not of a single form." Some say that the heat of the first regimen should be like the heat of a brooding hen; others speak of it as the natural heat in the digestion of food and the nourishment of the body. Others again say that it is like the heat of the sun when he is in Aries. In order that the Stone be completed through one process, the manipulation of the fire must be varied in no fewer than three ways. The first manipulation should be a mild and moderate heat which should continue until the matter has blackened, then changed to white; and this is compared to the heat of the sun when he is in Aries and in the beginning of Taurus. As soon as the whiteness appears it should be increased until the complete desiccation or incineration of the Stone, and this heat is like that of the sun when he is in Taurus and in the beginning of Gemini. And now, when the Stone is dried and turned to ashes, the fire is again increased until it is completely red and clad by the fire in kingly garments. This heat is compared to the sun's when he is in Leo, which is [f.35r] the highest dignity of his house. Sufficient has now been said of the regulation of the fire.

[35v] On the colours which appear in the preparation of the Stone

THE FIFTH TREATISE

Miraldus the Philosopher says in the *Turba*: “Twice it turns black, twice also it turns yellow and twice red.” Cook it, then, and in the cooking many colours appear, and according to the colours, so the heat is altered. Although all colours appear, there are only [f.36r] three that predominate as principal colours, namely black, white and red. Between these various others appear, especially a yellow colour after the white or after the first red. Miraldus does not count it because it is not a perfect colour. As Ciliator says, it remains in the matter scarcely long enough for one to see it. But the other yellowish colour which results after the perfect white and before the last red does show itself in the matter for a while. Hence certain philosophers have also regarded it as a principal colour.

Miraldus says, as mentioned above, that it does appear, but not for so long as the black, white or red, which stay in the matter over four days.

The black and red come twice but are more perfect the second time. But the first perfect colour is black, which manifests in the very mildest heat. Ciliator says that the softening should proceed with mild warmth until the black has gone; and Lucas [f.36v] the Philosopher says in the *Turba*: “Beware of a strong fire: for if you make the fire excessive at the start it will become red before its time, and that will not help you.” Therefore at the beginning of its regulation you should have the black, then the white, and lastly the red.

Baltheus the Philosopher speaks thus in the *Turba*: “Cook your mixture until you see it white, and quench it in vinegar, and divide the black from the white.” For the white is a sign that it is approaching fixation. It must also be removed from the black by the fire of calcination, then through increasing heat the superfluous part separates itself and a crude earth remains beneath the material of the Stone, like a black ball of earth that no longer mingles with the pure and subtle matter of the Stone. And these are the words of the Philosophers: they say that the red should be drawn off from the white until there is nothing [f.37r] superfluous in it; it does not separate, but all becomes a perfect red, which they achieve with a stronger fire. And Pythagoras testifies to this when he says: “The more the colours change, the stronger you should make the fire, so that it no longer fears the fire, since the matter is fixed by the white and the Spiritus does not flee from it.” Of this Lucas the Philosopher says: “When our Magnesia is made

white, the Spiritus will not fade from it." Thus the Philosophers speak about the colours, and this conclusion follows.

Hermes, the Father of the Philosophers, says that one should not extract the aforesaid white Magnesia until all the colours are completed. It is a water that divides into four other waters, namely from one into two, and three into one. A third part thereof belongs to the heat, two thirds to the moisture. These waters are the Weights of the Wise.

One must also know that the Vine, which is a Sap of the Wise, is [f.37v] drawn off in the fifth; but its wine will be completed in correct proportion in the third. For during the cooking it decreases, and in the trituration it forms itself. In all this are comprised beginning and end. Therefore some Philosophers say that it will be perfected in seven days. But some say in three or four times, some in ten days or forty days, and others in a year. The *Turba* and Alphidius say in the four seasons of the year: spring, summer, autumn and winter. Also in a day, in a week, and in a month. The philosophers Geber and Artos say in three years. All of which is no different from one thing in one thing, whose manipulation is manifold, as are the times, weights and names. All of this a wise artist must know, else he will achieve nothing.

[38v] On the properties of the whole work of preparing the Stone

THE SIXTH TREATISE

Calcination is set at the beginning of the Work like the father of a lineage. It is threefold, two parts appertaining to the body and the third to the spirit. The first is a preparation of the cold moisture which protects the wood lest it burn up, and that is at the start of our work. The second is a [f.39r] fatty moisture that makes the wood burn. And the third is an incineration or turning of the dry earth to ashes, and gives a truly fixed and subtle moisture. It is moreover small, giving off no flame, and produces a clear body like glass. In such a way the Philosophers prescribe the making of their calcination, and it is achieved with Aqua Permanens or Acetum Acerrimum, the same moisture as that within the metals, for it is the beginning of the fusion. As Hermes says: "The water is a beginning of every soft thing."

Hence the Philosophers' calcination is a sign of the destructive moisture, and an application of another, fiery moisture from which arise the

essence and the life. Therefore it is called a fusion or incineration, and it takes place with the Philosophers' Water, which is actually the sublimation or Philosophers' resolution, whereby the hard dryness is changed into a soft dryness. Then is extracted the Quintessence and separation of the Elements. And that [f.39v] happens because the parts that were dried out by the fire and compressed together have become subtilized by the spirit, which is a resolving water and moistens the incinerated bodies. And it tempers the destructive heat in an airy resolution, and that is the vaporous property of the Element.

On this account it is called the sublimation, so that the gross earthiness is made vaporous or subtle, turned to a watery moisture; and the coldness of the water is turned to the warmth of the air; and the moisture of the air to the heat of the fire. And that is the inversion of the Elements, and the Quintessence extracted from the elemental faeces. This Quintessence is an active moisture of a very high nature, which then tinctures innumerable times.

It is also the true fixation of which Geber says: "Nothing becomes fixed unless it is illumined and turns to a beautiful translucent substance." Thence arises the Philosophers' Sulphur, or the ash which is extracted from ashes. Without that the whole mastery is in vain, for it is a metallic [f.40r] water that rejoices in the body and makes it alive. It is an elixir of the Red and White Tincture, and a tincturing spirit.

In this work there also occurs the proper ablution of the blackness and the stench, slain and again brought to life by the introduction of a pure indestructible heat, and a metallic moisture from which it derives its tincturing power. Then is completed the Philosophers' putrefaction or decay spoken of at the start of this book. So its initial appearance is destroyed, and what was concealed is made manifest. As the *Turba* says: "Putrefaction is the first thing, and demands the utmost secrecy."

It is also the true separation of the Elements, which must be inverted. The *Turba* says thereof: "Invert the Elements: what is moist, make dry, and what is volatile make fixed." And later it says: "When all is crushed to powder, it has been diligently prepared, and this is the Philosophers' trituration." Senior says thereof: "The calcination will avail nothing unless a powder result from it."

It is also the decoction of which the Philosophers speak, especially Albertus [f.40v] Magnus, saying: "Of all arts there is none which follows

nature as alchemy does, because of its cooking and formation." For it is decocted in the fiery and red metallic waters, which contain the most form and the least matter.

It is also the Philosophers' assation or roasting, for the incidental moisture is consumed in a gentle fire. Most of all, one should take heed that the spirit which dries out the body and is dried out of the body does not escape the body, otherwise it will not be perfect.

It is also the Philosophers' distillation or clarification, which is nothing else than a purification of a thing with its essential moisture. And with the coagulation the Philosophers terminate the whole Work.

Of this Hermes says: "Its nurse is the earth, and its power is perfect if it be converted into a fixed earth, and then innumerable effects (as will follow hereafter) shall be made possible by it." So it is achieved in no other way than the natural one, [41r] for this art follows nature in truth, and not in parables as other arts do. Senior confirms that when he says: "No one alive can achieve this art without nature: yea, I say, with such nature as is given to nature from heaven."

[f.41v] On the manifold effects of the whole Work, and why the Philosophers have so many names and allegories in this art of preparing the Philosophers' Stone.

THE SEVENTH TREATISE

It is a common saying of all Philosophers that whoever knows how to slay the quicksilver is a master of this art. But one must pay [f.42r] the most studious attention to their quicksilver, for they describe it very variously. Senior speaks thus: "Our fire is a water. If you can give fire to fire, and mercury to mercury, then you know it well enough." Thereby he calls quicksilver a water and a fire, and the fire must be made with fire. Again he says: "The soul is extracted by decay. And when nothing of the soul remains, you have well washed the body, which is both a soul and a body." It is also called Quinta Essentia or a Spirit, Aqua Permanens or Menstruum. The *Turba* says: "Take the quicksilver and coagulate it in the body of magnesia, or in incombustible sulphur, and dissolve it in the sharpest vinegar; and in the vinegar it will not turn black, white or red, thus becoming a dead quicksilver." It is white in colour before the fire comes to it, then it becomes red. Thus speaks the *Turba*: "Lay it in gold so that it

becomes an [f.42v] elixir, that is its tincture, and it is a fair water drawn out of many tinctures; it gives life and colour to all to whom it is brought." Then the *Turba* says: "The colour Tiryus is a red colour, which is the very best of all. Next comes a rich purple colour, and this is the true quicksilver. It brings a sweet taste and is a genuine tincture." From this it is to be understood that the Philosophers have ascribed to quicksilver not only the beginning of their art, but also the middle and the perfect end.

Hermes, the Father of the Philosophers, speaks thus of it: "I have observed a bird which the Philosophers call Orsam. It flies when it is in Aries, Cancer, Libra or Capricorn, and you can obtain it in perpetuity from true minerals and rare mountains." You should divide its parts, and especially what remains after the division. If the earth is complexioned and you see many colours in it, then it is what the wise [f.43r] men call Cera Sapientiae and Plumbum. The Philosophers say that it should be roasted and distilled for a day and an age, according to the number and division of the parts. They give the things many names, saying: "Sublime it, rectify it until the basis remains. Incinerate it and imbibe it until it flows. Wash it and make it fair until it becomes white. Put it to death and bring it to life again. File and break it up until the concealed becomes manifest and the manifest concealed. Separate the elements and put them together again. Grind it until the corporeal becomes spiritual and vice versa. Leach out the salt from the body. Rectify the body and spirit. Make Venus white, take away Jupiter's thunderbolt, make Saturn hard and Mars soft, make Luna yellow, and dissolve all bodies in a water which bestows perfection on them all."

They also teach much about roasting the Black Sulphur until it becomes red. Then they heat the distillation until it becomes a watery transparent gum like the Corpus [f.43v] which then is much prized and honoured, and is called Lac Virginis. Then they mix the water that is extracted from the Virgin's Milk, and turn it to a redgolden gum and a thick, transparent water, which one should coagulate. Therefore they call it Tinctura Sapientiae, and a fire, the colours, a soul, and a spirit, which after much wandering comes home again.

They also call it Sulphur Rubeum, Gumi Aureum, Corpus Desideratum, Aurum Singulare, Aurum Apparens; also Aqua Sapientiae, Terram Argenteam, Terram Albam, and Aerem Sapientiae, especially if it possesses great whiteness. Of it is written in the *Turba*: "You should know that if you do not make your gold white, you will also not be able to make it red, for

the two are the same nature.” The white is made from the red, the black, and a pure water; the crystalline will appear from the citrine red. Therefore Senior says: “It is a wonderful thing: if you cast it over the other three mixed together, it helps the white over the citrine, and the red it makes white like the colour of silver. Then it helps the red over the citrine, and makes the same white.” [f.44r] And Morienus speaks thus: “Behold the perfect citrine, which changes in its yellowness; and the perfect red, which forms in its redness and furthers the perfect black in its blackness.”

Hence it is clear that the gold of the Philosophers is other than the common gold or silver, although some philosophers happen to compare it to these, and indeed to all metals. Senior says: “I am a hard and dry iron, and there is nothing that resembles me, for I am a coagulation of the Quicksilver of the Philosophers.” The *Turba* says: “Copper and lead become a precious Philosophers’ Stone. The lead that the Philosophers call red lead is a beginning of the whole work; without it nothing can be done.” And they also say of it: “From red lead make iron or crocus. From white lead make a white tincture or tin; from tin make copper; from copper make white lead; from white [f.44v] lead make cinnabar; from cinnabar make a tincture; and you have begun the wisdom.” However, the Philosopher says: “Nothing is nearer to gold than lead, for in it is life and the secret of all secrets.” But that is not said of common lead. The same is said of marcasite, whereby the stinking earth receives golden sparks. As Morienus says: “It is also compared to arsenic, orpiment and tutia, and to many things which are not at all mineral, such as the Four Complexions; to theriac, to the basilisk, to blood; likewise to many common things including among minerals salt, alum, vitriol and the rest, on account of its many qualities.”

But above all Alphidius warns us, saying: “Dear Son, beware of the spirits, bodies and stones which are dead, as I have said: for in these there is no progress, nor will you find there your purpose and design. For their power does not increase, but comes to nothing.” But the Philosophers’ Salt, which is a tincture, is extracted like other Sal Alcali from bodies, and is also that which is extracted from the body of the metals. Of that [f.45r] Senior says: “First it becomes ashes, then a salt, and through manifold effort it becomes at last a Philosophic Mercury. But above all the Sal Ammoniac is the best and noblest of all that exists.”

Aristotle in the Book of the Seven Commandments speaks thus of it: “Almisadir, that is Sal Ammoniac, should serve you alone, for this dissolves

bodies and makes them soft and spiritual." The *Turba* says the same, in these words: "You should know that the body does not tincture itself unless the Spirit which lies hidden in its belly be drawn out; then it becomes a water, and a body which is of a spiritual nature." For the gross earthly thing does not tincture itself: the proper one is of a thinner nature and colours it. But the spirit which is of a watery nature tinctures it into an elixir, because what has been taken out of it is a white and red fixation that colours perfectly: a penetrating tincture that mixes with all metals.

The perfection of the whole mastery depends on these few points. One should draw out the sulphur from the perfect bodies which have the fixed Mars, for the sulphur is the noblest and subtlest part: a [f.45v] crystalline salt, sweet and tasty, and a radical moisture, which, even if it stands in the fire for a year, is always like melted wax. Therefore a little part exalts a large mass of common quicksilver into genuine gold. Hence the moisture or water which one draws out of the metallic bodies is called the Soul of the Stone, or the Mercury. But its powers are called the Spirit when it affects things of a sulphurous nature. The gross earth is the body or the Corpus, the Quintessence, and the Ultimate Tincture. And these three are all a single thing, from a single root, only of different effects. Though the names of these things are innumerable, they all concern one thing. They are like a chain, equal and attached to one another, so that when one ceases another begins.

[f.46r] In this last part are to be found the virtues and powers of this noble tincture, which is a strong tower against its enemies. Know that the ancient sages discovered four chief virtues in the laudable art. First, it makes one healthy and free from manifold diseases. Second, it makes perfect the metallic bodies. Third, it transforms all common stones into precious stones. Fourth, it makes malleable any glass.

Of the first, the Philosophers say that if one takes it in a warm drink of wine or water it straightway makes one well. It heals paralysis, dropsy, leprosy, jaundice, heart palpitations, colic, fever, epilepsy, the gripes, and many other pains within the body. It also heals all exterior ailments if one anoints oneself with it. It removes the harmful flux from an unhealthy stomach; all melancholy, depression and colds. It also prevents all afflictions of the eyes, strengthens the heart, restores the hearing, makes good teeth, restores lame limbs and heals [f.46v] abscesses. To sum up, one takes it internally or applies it in a powder or salve. Senior says: "It makes a

man glad and young, and keeps his body happy, fresh and healthy, protected from internal and external maladies."

It is therefore a medicine above all other medicines of Hippocrates, Galen, Constantine, Alexander, Avicenna, and all others learned in medicine. One should also mix this medicine with other medicines or with waters which are good against the disease.

Of the second virtue it is written that it transforms all imperfect metals. That is evident, for it makes any silver completely golden in colour, substance and weight, and identical in melting, softness and hardness.

Of the third it is written that this medicine also makes all stones into precious stones such as jasper, jacinth, red and white corals, emerald, chrysolite and sapphire, crystals, carbuncles, ruby and topaz, which are far better and more efficacious than the natural ones. It also makes all common and precious stones dissolve and soften.

[f.47r] Fourthly, when one applies the said medicine to molten or crushed glass, it can be cut and turned to all colours. Any skilful craftsman can discover the rest for himself through experiment.

Conclusion

This most precious art, comforter of the poor, noble Alchemy, above all natural arts that men ever have on earth, should be acknowledged as a gift from God. For [47v] the most part it is described in manifold sayings and figures, concealed in the parables of the ancient sages. Senior the Philosopher says: "An intelligent man who meditates on this art will soon grasp or understand it, if his mind or heart are illuminated, from the books of knowledge of this art."

Hence he who would do wisely should seek the wisdom of the ancient sages, which uses for its delivery many parables, definitions and enigmatic sayings in which their operation is concealed and hard to decipher. For reflection is a very subtle sense, and only to those who have understanding in these matters is it quite easy and natural. But to those who have no understanding of it, as Senior also says, nothing is more contemptible than this art. Yet in nature there is nothing more precious than one who has this art. He is rich, as one is rich in fire who has a flint stone from which he can strike fire whenever, however, and for whomever he will, without diminution of the stone. Rich gold is bestowed on him in abundance.

Moreover, it is a [f.48r] better thing than any merchandise, gold and silver, and its fruits are better than any of the world's riches. For why? Through it they are completed, since it affords long life and health. For its final fruit is the genuine Aurum and the all-powerful Balsam, and the supremely precious gift of God. Thus the ancient sages achieved it in nature, together with art.

Glossary of Alchemical Philosophers and Works Referred to in Splendor Solis

Georgiana Hedesan

ALBERTUS MAGNUS

Albertus Magnus, or Albert the Great (*c*. 1200–80) was one of the greatest medieval philosophers and a founder of scholasticism. A Dominican friar from southern Germany, Albert took a particular interest in metallurgy, writing a well-known commentary on Aristotle called *De mineralibus* ("On minerals"). In it, he critically addressed the claims of alchemists and argued that transmutation was possible, but only by natural means, something that is mirrored in the *Splendor solis* quote. Legends about his alchemical knowledge became widespread after his death, and many pseudo-Albertian treatises were shared in alchemical circles.

ALPHIDIUS

Nothing is known about Alphidius, who was probably an Arabic alchemist of the Middle Ages. Several sayings by him are included in *Rosarium philosophorum* ("Rose Garden of the Philosophers", first published in 1550) and Petrus Bonus's *Pretiosa margarita novella* (*see* Ferrarius). A short allegorical treatise by Alphidius appeared in *Thesaurinella olympica tripartita*, a German alchemical compendium edited by Benedictus Figulus and published in 1608.

ARISTOTLE

The alchemical reputation of the great ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BCE) hinged primarily on two texts, both cited by *Splendor solis*: the fourth book of the *Meteorology* (whose authenticity has been disputed)

and the spurious *Secretum secretorum* (“The Secret of Secrets”), in reality an Arabic work of circa 9th century. The fourth book of *Meteorology* does contain references that could be interpreted as supporting transmutation. The *Secretum* was purported to contain the “secret teachings” of Aristotle for his real-life pupil Alexander the Great; it survives in many versions and a number of languages, some of which contain a chapter on alchemy and an early version of the *Emerald Tablet* (*Tabula smaragdina*) of Hermes Trismegistus (*see* Hermes). The other references are to Aristotle’s authentic *Book of Generation and Corruption* and to a variously attributed alchemical treatise called *Liber de septuaginta* (“Book of the Seven Commandments”).

ARTOS

Artos is a corrupt version of Aristoteles (Aristotle), as the Berlin manuscript of *Splendor solis* has Aristoteles instead of Artos.

AVICENNA

The Persian physician and philosopher Avicenna, or Ibn Sina (980– 1037) is primarily known for his great works on medicine and philosophy, particularly the *Canon of Medicine*, the core medical book of the Latin Middle Ages. Avicenna was equally inspired by Aristotle and Galen, both of whom he understood through a Neoplatonic lens and tried to adapt to the Islamic monotheistic faith. Avicenna was a transmutation sceptic, and expressed his negative views in his famous treatise on minerals, *De congelatione et conglutinatione lapidum* (“On the Congelation and Conglutination of Stones”). This did not prevent some scholars from attributing to him one of the most influential works of medieval alchemy, *De anima in arte alchemiae* (“On the Soul in the Art of Alchemy”). The author of *Splendor solis* evidently took Avicenna for a supporter of alchemy, although he criticized the physician’s panaceas as having an effect inferior to that achieved through the process described in the treatise.

BALTHEUS

Baltheus is a different spelling for Balgus, a philosopher who appears in *Turba philosophorum* (“The Assembly of Philosophers”, *c*. 900), one of the chief works *Splendor solis* draws on (*see Turba*). Balgus has been

tentatively translated back into the original Greek as Pelagios. However, it is not clear that he should be identified with Pelagius (*c*. 360–418), the Christian theologian who denied Augustine's doctrine of original sin and advocated good works as a path to salvation. Balgus gives Sermon LVIII in *Turba.*

CALID

Calid is the chief Latin spelling of the historical figure of Khalid ibn Yazid (d. 704), an Arab Umayyad prince based in Damascus who was the son of Caliph Yazid I and brother of Caliph Muawiya II. Removed from the caliphate succession, Khalid took refuge in scholarly study. He had a documented interest in alchemy, facilitating translations of alchemical works from Greek and Coptic into Arabic, but it is not clear that he was a practising alchemist himself. According to alchemical tradition however, he was taught the art by a Greek monk called Morienus or Marianos (*see* Morienus). Several apocryphal manuscripts survive in his name, including *Liber secretorum alchemiae* ("The Book of Alchemical Secrets") and *Liber trium verborum* ("The Book of the Three Words", see *Three Words*).

CILIATOR

Ciliator is a corrupt spelling for Conciliator (Reconciler), the nickname of the Italian philosopher Peter of Abano or Pietro d'Abano (*c*. 1257–1316). Abano was professor of medicine at Padua, an avid astrologer and purported magician. His main work was *Conciliator differentiarum, quæ inter philosophos et medicos versantur* ("The Reconciler of the Differences between Philosophers and Physicians", 1303), which gave him the nickname. Abano supported the use of alchemy in medicine, although he was probably not a practitioner himself.

FERRARIUS

The mentions of Ferrarius refer to Petrus Bonus of Ferrara, an alchemist whose only known work is the scholastic treatise *Pretiosa margarita novella* ("The New Precious Pearl"), written *c*. 1330. The work of Petrus Bonus is known for its tendency to present alchemy in a religious framework and to maintain that the Philosophers' Stone was supernatural.

He was also one of the promoters of the idea that the ancient poets (particularly Ovid and Virgil) had codified the secret of alchemical gold in their myths, a view that is also present in *Splendor solis*.

GALIENUS

The reference is to the great Greek physician Galen (129–*c*. 200/216), whose medical philosophy dominated the Middle Ages and part of the early modern period. Galen was seldom viewed as an alchemist, but there were some spurious alchemical treatises attributed to him, out of which this quote is extracted.

GEBER

Geber here refers to Latin Pseudo-Geber, not the perhaps legendary Arab philosopher Jābir ibn Hayyān (fl. 8th–9th century). Pseudo-Geber was probably the pseudonym of the Italian Franciscan friar Paul of Taranto (13th century), who preferred to publish under the name of the more famous alchemist Jābir. The chief work of Pseudo-Geber was *Summa perfectionis magisterii* ("The Height of the Perfection of the Magistery"), a treatise that had a huge impact on the development of medieval and early modern alchemy.

HALI

Hali is the same as Khalid (*see* Calid).

HERMES

The "Hermes" mentioned in *Splendor solis* is, of course, the mythical philosopher Hermes Trismegistus (Hermes the "thrice great"). A large corpus was assembled in his name in the Late Antiquity, and throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Hermes was revered as one of the greatest ancient philosophers. He was also deemed to be the founder of alchemy and the author of a short alchemical text called the *Emerald Tablet* (of Arab origin, it is now thought). Scholars believe that Hermes Trismegistus never existed, but was an imaginary character based on traits associated with the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian god Thoth.

LUCAS

Lucas appears in *Turba philosophorum*, an Arabic work that was later translated into Latin (*see Turba*). The Latin name Lucas is based on the Arabic translation of the name of the ancient Greek philosopher Leucippus (fl. 5th century BCE), considered the father of atomism and teacher of Democritus. In *Turba philosophorum*, Lucas/Leucippus gives a long sermon (Sermon XII), as well as two short ones (VI and LXVII).

MENALDUS

Menaldus refers to Menabdus or Menabadus in the *Turba philosophorum* (*see Turba*). Menabdus has been identified with the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Parmenides (late 6th–early 5th century BCE). Confusingly, Parmenides also appears under his own name as well as that of Mundus in the *Turba*. Menabdus speaks in Sermon XXV, where he discusses the need to transform the corporeal into the spiritual and vice-versa. Parmenides gives Sermon XI, while Mundus gives Sermons XVIII, XLVII, LXII and LXX.

MIRALDUS

There is no philosopher by the name of Miraldus in the *Turba philosophorum* (*see Turba*). The name may refer to Menaldus (*see* Menaldus).

MORIENUS

Morienus, or Marianus, was a legendary Coptic monk living in the time of Khalid ibn Yazid (d. 704) (*see* Calid). Morienus was supposed to have been taught alchemy by “Adfar Alexandrinus”, a figure usually assimilated with the Byzantine philosopher Stephen of Alexandria (fl. 610–641). In turn, Morienus taught Khalid the principles of true alchemy. The name Morienus is tied to a key source of medieval alchemy, the *Testament* of Morienus Romanus (also called *Liber de compositione alchemiae*), which was the first alchemical treatise to be translated from Arabic to Latin by Robert of Ketton, sometimes identified with Robert of Chester (1144).

OVID

The Roman poet Ovid's (43 BCE–17/18 ce) masterpiece *Metamorphoses* was one of the works that late medieval alchemists such as Petrus Bonus (*see* Ferrarius) liked to refer to as proof that truths about philosophical gold could be codified in poetic form. The reference here is to the story of Medea, who rejuvenated old

Aeson by cutting his throat and reviving him as a young man. (*Metamorphoses* VII).

PHILOSOPHUS (*TURBA* OR ARISTOTLE)

It is not clear who this "Philosopher" refers to. *Philosophus* was usually a nickname of Aristotle, considered in the medieval period to be the philosopher *par excellence.* The term may also refer to the anonymous "Philosopher" in *Turba philosophorum (see Turba*), who speaks in Sermons LXIII and LXXII and does refer to lead, though this precise quote cannot be identified.

PYTHAGORAS

The pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Pythagoras of Samos (*c*. 570– *c*. 495 BCE) is portrayed as an alchemist in the *Turba philosophorum* (*see Turba*). The philosopher features prominently in this work, speaking in Sermons VIII, XIII, XXXI, XLVIII, and LXIV. The synod itself is described as having been convened by Arisleus (Archelaus), the disciple of Pythagoras. Arisleus begins the narration by praising his master as being the wisest after Hermes Trismegistus. As such, the Pythagorean school is portrayed as being in close connection to the older Hermetic one, and implicitly to alchemy.

RHASES

Rhases (Abū B akr M uhammad i bn Z akariyyā al -Rāzī, 854– 925) was a Persian philosopher, physician and alchemist, author of many important works on medicine and two on alchemy. The quotes in *Spendor solis*, however, refer to *Lumen luminum* ("Light of Lights"), which is considered a

pseudo-Razi work. The *Lumen luminum* had a major impact on Latin alchemy, and chiefly on Roger Bacon's ideas.

ROSINUS

Rosinus is the medieval Latin name of the alchemist Zosimos of Panopolis (*c*. 300), who lived in Roman Egypt. Zosimos perceived alchemy in light of his gnostic beliefs, as a sacred art. Zosimos had a female disciple, Theosebeia, who may have been his sister; together they are recorded to have written a large, 28-book encyclopedia of alchemy called *Cheirokmeta* ("Manipulations"), out of which only fragments remain. Perhaps the most famous fragment is "Of Virtue", a description of his dream-visions that show alchemical processes in highly allegorical terms.

SCALA PHILOSOPHORUM

Scala philosophorum ("The Ladder of Philosophers") is a work of late medieval Latin alchemy, attributed to Guido de Montanor (14th/15th century). It is famed for its clear description of the phases of the alchemical Work. It was first published in 1550 in Latin, then translated into French and German.

SENIOR

Muhammed ibn Umail al-Tamîmî (*c*. 900–60) was usually known as Senior or Senior Zadith in medieval Latin sources. The name Senior originated from Umail's title of *sheikh* (elder, leader). Umail wrote many works of alchemy, but the most famous and influential was *The Silvery Water and the Starry Earth*, where Umail described discovering the tablet of an "ancient sage", a kind of pictorial variant of the *Emerald Tablet* of Hermes Trismegistus (*see* Hermes). *The Silvery Water* had considerable impact on Latin alchemy when it was translated in the 12th or 13th century as Senior (Zadith)'s *Tabula chemica*.

SOCRATES

Socrates (*c*. 470–399 BCE), the famous ancient Greek philosopher and tutor of Plato, was sometimes, though rarely, viewed as an alchemist. He appears

as one in *Turba philosophorum* (*see Turba*), both under his own name and that of Florus (Flritis, Fiorus), and delivers Sermons XV, XVI and LXIX.

THREE WORDS

"The Book of Three Words" (*Liber trium verborum*) is a short alchemical treatise that was attributed to Khalid ibn Yazid (*see* Calid). It sometimes circulated together with *Summa perfectionis magisterii* of Latin Pseudo-Geber (*see* Geber). It was cited as an authority in the *Rosarium philosophorum* as well as in *Splendor solis*.

TURBA

The *Turba philosophorum* ("The Assembly of Philosophers") is one of the earliest, and most famous alchemical treatises. It has been dated to *c*. 900 in the Arab world, and represents an attempt at grounding alchemy in ancient Greek philosophy. The *Turba* is made up of a long series of philosophical sayings, grouped into "sermons". While some of the philosophers present have well-known names (Plato, Socrates, Parmenides, Pythagoras), most sound unfamiliar. Through the efforts of scholars, mainly Julius Ruska and Martin Plessner, some of these names have been decoded back into the original Greek, yielding pre-Socratic philosophers like Empedocles, Archelaus, Leucippus or Anaximander. The purpose of the *Turba* was to demonstrate the ancient roots of alchemy and its thorough grounding in Greek philosophy.

VIRGIL

While the author of *Splendor solis* does not clearly state that the Roman poet Virgil (70–19 BCE) was an alchemist, there is an implication that the myths rendered in his epic work the *Aeneid* hid a deeper meaning than the literal one. It is known that, during the Middle Ages, Virgil acquired the reputation of being a great magician, and in the later period, alchemists like Petrus Bonus argued that Virgil codified the process of making philosophical gold in stories such as that of the golden bough (*Aeneid* 6.136–148).

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